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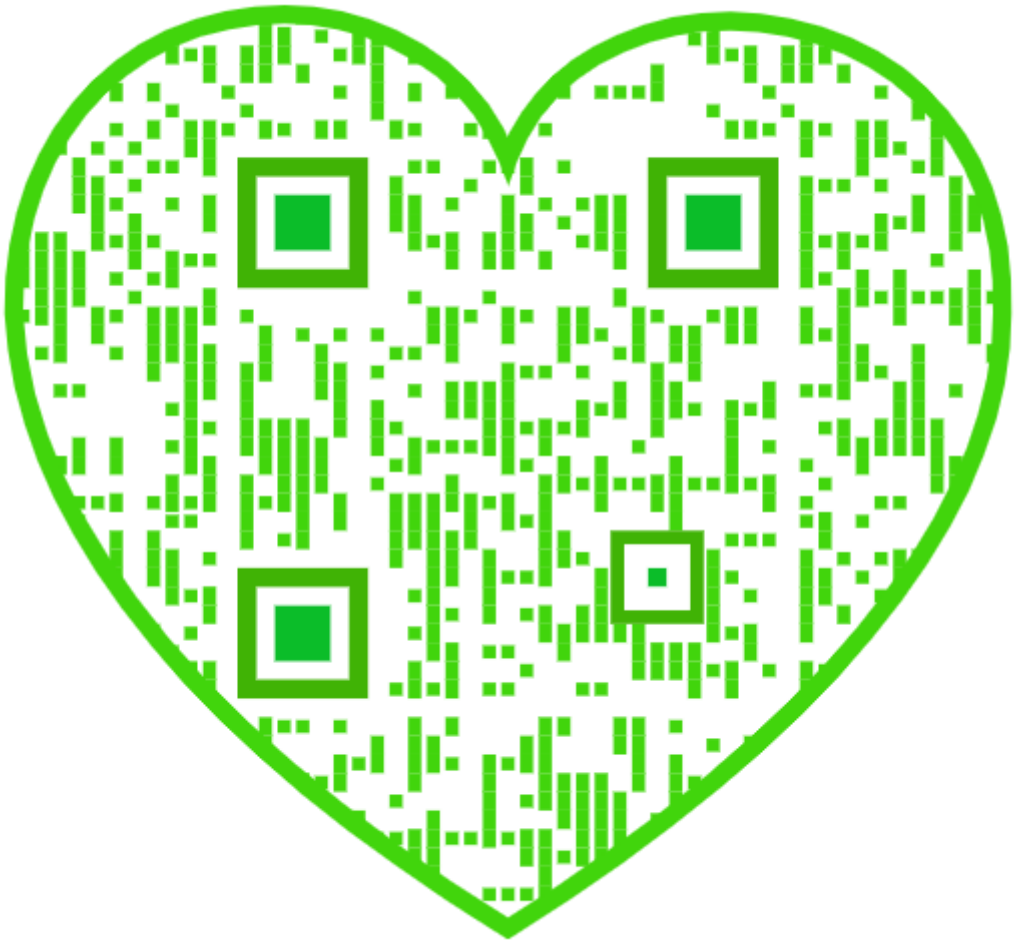

# OLD OAK FURNITURE

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OAK BUFFET INLAID WITH IVORY AND MOTHER-OF-PEARL
DATED 1661

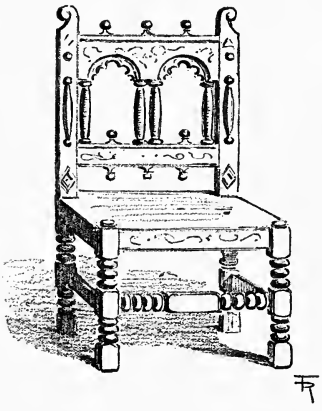
# OLD OAK FURNITURE

BY

FRED ROE

AUTHOR OF

'ANCIENT COFFERS AND CUPBOARDS



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# PREFACE

THERE are possibly almost as many fallacies on the subject of old oak as there are connected with family portraits. The cicerone who gravely assures you that the gaze of a certain portrait will follow the beholder in his passage round the room is not lacking in a similar display of imagination when affecting to give you the history of chest and chair and cabinet. The value of tradition must be admitted; but in the science of archæology the unaided eye of faith is insufficient.

The object which the writer has aimed at in the present work is to classify the various examples of each article of furniture as near as may be in chronological order. I have in the great majority of cases, and wherever it has been possible, based my descriptions and theories on personal investigation of the articles discussed, whether English or Continental, occasionally supporting conjectures as to dates by the

external evidence of contemporary writers or manuscript illustrators. In studying the history of furniture, it should always be remembered that the restoration of rare or unusual objects in one's mind's eye, though an intensely fascinating occupation, is one which is apt to lead astray. Viollet le Duc, while giving a most astounding series of details from personal research, obviously romances at times through this love of elaboration. While admiring the greatness of his master-mind, I have endeavoured to withstand the insidious temptation of reconstruction.

If any apology is needed for what may be termed old oak worship, I may say that the final aim of art is —or ought to be—beauty, and that the cult of old oak is really only one aspect of the pursuit of beauty.

As regards the collecting proclivity, it is singular to remark how the remains of the old Viking spirit crops up in the English of to-day. It is shown in an intense desire to 'get about' the 'travel hunger' which seizes on no inconsiderable proportion of our fellow countrymen. The desire to sack and burn may be lacking, but it has been replaced by the acquisitive instinct, which prompts men to plunder more peacefully. This sense has caused the temporary disappearance of many articles of profound public interest into private collec-

tions. On the other hand, it has been responsible for the rescue of innumerable antiquities from oblivion and destruction. Many priceless coffers and early heaumes and bassinettes which had descended to such base uses as receptacles for vestry coals or well-pitchers have, by the efforts of collectors, been once more appreciated at their proper value. We must also remember that these treasures acquired by collectors often find their way, by a natural process of progressive elevation of taste, into some national museum, where they can be seen and studied for all time.

# OLD OAK FURNITURE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY—THE CULT OF OAK-COLLECTING

NOT many years ago 'oak-collecting' was considered to be a form of eccentricity. Then came a period when the taste became more general, and many people imagined themselves to be adepts in the art simply from the fact that they possessed a chest or two of rough-and-ready design and workmanship, or perchance an arm-chair with a panelled back. Occasionally a specimen of more than ordinary beauty and value was acquired, but the chances are that its peculiar merits were unseen or not properly understood, the piece being looked upon as genuine with the rest of the collection. Chance collectors have in stray instances done the most valuable service possible by preserving, with simple love, types of the rarest kind. Unfortunately this medal has a reverse. The passion for collecting, when associated with a love for practical wood-carving, has, alas! only too often proved the ruin of really fine specimens by manifesting itself in attempts at their further embellishment. It can-

not be insisted upon too strongly that to work on a piece, be it ever so plain, for any object but reparation, actually necessitated by age and wear, is at once to depreciate, if not destroy, its value in the eyes of a connoisseur.

One result of the Waverley romances was to arouse a keen interest in antiquities, but this, being to a great extent unaccompanied by any proper knowledge, led frequently to the production and acquisition of bastard imitations of the furniture of our forefathers. It can be no difficult matter for many of us to recollect what may be termed without error an old-fashioned home amongst the residences of our acquaintances, and recall the ghastly perpetrations for domestic use which the unrestrained relish for romance brought into existence during the first half of the nineteenth century. Even the great Sir Walter Scott himself, to whom posterity cannot be sufficiently thankful for creating an interest in objects of antiquity, seems to have possessed no special knowledge of furniture, and in his descriptions the details are often far from being reliable. Illustrated books of Sir Walter's day and still later times often display the most glaring anachronisms. And yet some years ago, before the art of steel and wood engraving became practically extinct, a great many very careful works on such antiquities were published which contain illustrations of articles we should be only too glad to trace now. Amongst these, here and there, one may incidentally remark some beautiful early coffers existing at the date of publication in

private collections, of which little or nothing is usually said, although what can be seen in the illustrations creates a desire to know more of such interesting examples. In most cases it would be nearly impossible to discover their ownership at the present time, and reference can consequently be made only to the well-executed plates. Shaw and Scott, while affording some very excellent illustrations of ancient woodwork, give practically no descriptions at all.

A French chest, of Gothic design, exhibiting armed figures under canopies, is depicted in Jacquemart's book on ancient furniture, published in 1876.* The text of this work, which shows the usual paucity of reference to early methods and examples, says nothing whatever about the chest in question, but the underline briefly indicates it as being in the collection of Monsieur A. Querroy. If genuine, this chest would probably date from the latter end of the fifteenth century, but there are not wanting some curious indications which seem to suggest that its complete authenticity might be open to doubt. It would be a matter of the greatest interest to examine this chest personally, if its whereabouts could be ascertained. With the magnificent knightly coffer which is pictured by Viollet le Duc, in his 'Dictionnaire du Mobilier Français,' we are more fortunate. This piece is there described as belonging to the collection of M. A. Gerente, but it has since found a home in the national collection of antiquities in the Cluny Museum in Paris.

* Jacquemart, 'Histoire du Mobilier,' Paris, 1876.

The Abbotsford impetus had no lasting effect, and ended in the relegation of antiques in the way of domestic furniture to the garrets and kitchens. I can myself remember as a boy that, in a home where mahogany and horsehair were plentiful, the finest piece of furniture in the whole house was abandoned to the housekeeper's room, as an out-of-date thing and of no particular interest. The piece in question happened to be a superb English buffet, inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, bearing the date 1661 on its front. We can, however, congratulate ourselves on the fact that, owing to its special situation, this buffet received more care and attention than the rest of the household's belongings, and remains to this day one of the most carefully-preserved specimens of the art of the period.

## CHAPTER II

### ARCHAIC RARITIES

WE know very little of the earliest methods of the construction and decoration of wooden furniture and domestic appliances. England, perhaps from the corroding nature of her climate, possesses fewer archaic rarities of this kind than most other countries. Some fragmentary specimens of Anglo-Saxon workmanship that survive give us a fair, though imperfect, insight into the arts and crafts that were practised before the Norman Conquest. The earliest of these is probably the coffin of St. Cuthbert, which is to be seen in the Cathedral Library at Durham. The history of this coffin is an interesting one. It is known that the Northern saint was buried in A.D. 688, and his body disinterred eleven years afterwards, in order that the remains might be deposited in a wooden coffin to be placed in a shrine within view of the public. In later times the Anglo-Saxon church in which the shrine stood was superseded by a Norman structure of greater pretension, and in 1104 the coffin and remains were translated thither. This building was the earliest stage of what we now know as Durham

Cathedral. Several particular descriptions by Norman writers of the coffin and its appearance have been preserved. From the day in which these accounts were written until the time of Henry VIII. the bones of the saint lay undisturbed, and were worshipped reverentially by thousands of pilgrims.

INCISED CARVING OF VIRGIN AND CHILD ON ST. CUTHBERT'S COFFIN, DURHAM

In the year 1542 the visit of the Royal Commissioners caused the monastic treasures to be scattered, and the coffin of St. Cuthbert was opened by desecrating hands for the purpose of gazing on the body of the saint. The remains, with the fragments of the Saxon coffin, were then enclosed in a large iron-bound chest and buried beneath a marble slab, around which may still be seen the grooves made by the constant wear of pilgrims' knees.

In the year 1827 the slab was again raised by the order of the Dean and Chapter, when, in the stone grave beneath, and almost filling up the space, the iron-bound chest, made in the time of Henry VIII.,

was found. Within it were two more coffins, the innermost of which bore runic inscriptions and rude representations of saints, and contained, amongst other things, a skeleton habited in the decayed remains of vestments of the church, some sacramental relics, and a gold cross, which are actually mentioned in the Norman description already referred to. The chain of evidence is very remarkable, but too long to enter into here. As described and followed up by Dr. Raine, who was a witness to the proceedings in 1827, it affords one of the best authenticated records which could possibly be cited. A new coffin was made after this latter examination, the bones of the saint being placed therein and reinterred. The cross and other ornaments were preserved in the Chapter library, but the coffin, which is perhaps the most interesting of all the relics connected with the saint, was put in a cupboard and forgotten!

Some few years ago an examination was made of the contents of the cupboard, and among a heap of decayed wood, which somewhat resembled coarse snuff in its consistency and colour, were found fragments of the Anglo-Saxon coffin. At first the reconstruction of these seemed a hopeless task, runic inscriptions, heads crowned with the nimbus, and portions of figures being mingled in apparently inextricable confusion, but, fortunately, a resident in the city, Mr. W. G. Footit, an architect, and an antiquary of great intelligence, had both the ability and the patience to grapple with the difficulties, and undertook the task of piecing

the fragments, with the result that a fairly perfect reconstruction of the coffin on its original lines may now be seen. We possess amongst our archaic treasures certain horn and whalebone carvings of approximately the same date, but St. Cuthbert's coffin is probably the only carving in wood of the seventh century remaining within the length and breadth of the land. It may be added that the sixteenth-century iron-bound coffer which contained these relics is placed in the castle buttery, where it may still be seen by the curious.

The Venerable Bede died at Wearmouth A.D. 735, and in the church at Monkswearmouth is a decaying chair of rude workmanship which is said to have belonged to him. The workmanship is so barbarous, there is such an absolute deficiency of detail, that it is well-nigh impossible to assign a date to it, but the slope of the crumbling arms suggests a likeness to the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey, and it may be within the range of possibility that the Wearmouth chair is only the rough production of a country carpenter, while the other specimen is the work of the accomplished craftsman of the city, both belonging to the early Gothic period. People are very apt to attach a circumstantial history and a spurious date to pieces of furniture which remain in the haunts or dwellings of the great departed. As an instance of this absurdity it is only necessary to refer to the celebrated Wycliffe chair at Lutterworth Church, Leicestershire, in which the reformer is actually said to have expired.

Wycliffe died in 1384, while the chair is unmistakably a seventeenth-century Jacobean production! Such popular fallacies regarding noted pieces of furniture are not confined to the more archaic examples, but extend to every period and every type, and of this some very pertinent instances will be detailed in a subsequent chapter.

To return to Anglo-Saxon antiquities, there is a whalebone box in the British Museum which is perhaps one of the greatest treasures of the kind. About this box much discussion has taken place. It is ornamented with carvings, surrounded by inscriptions in runic, which George Stephens, the well-known authority on Scandinavian antiquities, and the late Rev. D. H. Haigh, have deciphered. This inscription points to the box having been made at Ferryhill, in county Durham. It is worth while remarking that, while Roman letters occasionally appear amongst the runes incised upon St. Cuthbert's coffin, the inscription on the whalebone box is wholly runic. The carvings on this relic represent scenes of Christian history strangely mingled with pagan tradition; but what should be noticed is the nasal-shaped conical helmet and tegulated coats of mail which appear upon some of the figures, and indicate Northern influence. Though this casket is made of whalebone, and not of wood, it is expedient to refer to it to indicate what may have been done in the way of decoration in its day.

Of wooden Anglo-Saxon coffers, or, indeed, of

Norman, we have now no known specimen remaining. Several receptacles of the kind known as 'dugouts' exist in different parts of the country, notably one in Wimborne Minster, and are popularly assigned to Saxon times; but in several cases small details of ironwork tend to prove that these are not nearly so ancient as supposed, and belong most probably to the sixteenth century. The popular misconception that an article exhibiting very crude workmanship or excessively worm-eaten and dilapidated must necessarily be of venerable age should be carefully guarded against, for it is a fruitful source of error. The connoisseur who gives sufficient attention to small details, both in woodwork and its iron attachments, will often discover obscure evidence which will enable him to date approximately the object.

These 'dugouts,' which are constructed from the solid log, roughly squared with the adze and hollowed with the gouge, no doubt have an extremely ancient origin, but most of the specimens which remain to us can be proved to have no very great antiquity. The chest of St. Beuno, an ancient British saint, in Clynog Church, Carnarvonshire, is one of the most ancient, and is probably the earliest coffer of that or any other kind in the whole kingdom.* In the case of this receptacle, the lid (of small size) is made to fit into an

* It is said that when search was made for the burial-place of King Arthur, during the reign of Henry II., the bones of the British warrior were discovered some 16 feet below the surface of the ground, enclosed in the hollow trunk of an oak. See Camden's 'Britannia.'

opening in the upper surface of the log, whereas in other specimens the lid is mostly formed of the half longitudinal section of a tree, the convex surface being uppermost when the coffer was closed. The modern word 'trunk' no doubt had its origin in the practice of using a portion of the trunk of a tree, hewn out so as to form a receptacle for the safe-keeping of goods, a strength and rigidity being thus secured which could not otherwise be readily obtainable. We still see the survival of the circular form of the tree in the convex lid of the modern packing-trunk.

Though we have no actual specimens surviving of Anglo-Saxon tables or chairs, we are enabled in some sort to surmise what their decoration was like, but of their constructive form the illustrated manuscripts of the period give us but the scantiest knowledge. Almost the first attempt to represent, with distinctive accuracy, the shape of any particular piece of furniture is to be seen on the Great Seal of William the Conqueror, where the monarch is represented as enthroned upon a round chair without any semblance of a back. That this was one of the earliest forms of chair in England the frithstool at Hexham Priory, which dates from the twelfth century, still remains to testify; but whether these were carried out in wood as well as in stone we have no means of knowing. In the Leicester Hospital at Warwick is a three-legged chair, bearing decoration in the shape of incised zigzag ornamentation, which, together with the baluster shape of its uprights, has led local tradition to assign the chair to Saxon times.

This I believe to be quite a fallacy, the form of the chair, as well as its ornamentation, being precisely the same as others which were made in Holland and Scandinavia as late as the seventeenth century. In some of Teniers' pictures chairs bearing a similar outline may be seen, while it is well known that this curious incised species of Scandinavian decoration diffused itself over Europe at various periods, notably the thirteenth, the fifteenth, and the seventeenth centuries, being found so far south even as Spain, where it sometimes is associated with reminiscences of Moorish forms.

In the museum of Christiania University, among other early objects are two chairs carved in pinewood, which are stated to be Norwegian work of the ninth or tenth century. One was formerly in Tyldalen Church, in Oestadalen, the other formerly in use in Blaker Farm, in Lom, Gudbrandsbaten. There is nothing in the decoration of either of these chairs to negative the approximate dates mentioned; but the Scandinavians are well known for their intense conservatism in decoration, porringers, bowls, and other utensils being made till recently that have little to indicate that they may not have been designed many centuries ago. But the bare idea of a white pinewood chair, of not exceptionally strong make, surviving the use of 1,000 years, is not *primâ facie* credible, and the probability is that these chairs were made by a craftsman of unusual ability residing in the vicinity of some church or building, whose details suggested the decoration to him.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOTHIC STYLES

MEDIEVAL furniture down to the time of the Renaissance falls naturally into three periods: the first, Pointed, or 'Early English,' dating approximately from the commencement of the thirteenth century to the end of Henry III.'s reign, 1272; the second, Pointed, or 'Decorated,' dating from Edward I., 1272, to the death of Edward III., 1377; and the third, Pointed, or 'Perpendicular,' dating from the accession of Richard II., in 1377. In each of these periods the styles overlapped and intermingled, but with the Perpendicular style a curious circumstance is observable. This style continued in its purity till the reign of Henry VII., and then the French invasions across the Alps began to revive the traditions of pagan architecture from Rome. While, however, the Renaissance was superseding the Gothic tradition in the big cities and towns, it not infrequently happened that large buildings and works of debased Gothic character were being carried out side by side with the more fashionable style from Italy. Even at Oxford—that great seat of learning—the staircase of Christchurch College,

leading to the great hall, erected as late as 1640, was a Gothic structure showing not a trace of classic influence. Something may be allowed for the architect's or craftsman's individual taste, but it is a singular fact that this was the first birth of such independence. Thus it might happen that stalls, chairs, chests, or other objects of furniture would be produced in one town which exhibited the very essence of the new style, whilst not ten miles off such articles were being made as though the Renaissance had never taken place. This sometimes renders it very difficult for those who are not absolute masters of the science to assign a correct date to individual examples. To understand and classify properly various styles of furniture, especially those which were made during what may be termed the Gothic period, a careful study of domestic architecture is not only an excellent preparation, but also of the greatest assistance, even to those who are skilled connoisseurs of furniture. Many of the old timber houses which have dates carved upon them show how an opinion ought not to be rashly hazarded as to their age. The overlapping of the various periods and lingering of older styles were such that buildings may be assigned to a later, or more probably to an earlier, period than that to which they actually belong, if the evidence of style alone is taken into account. Many buildings at Shrewsbury might be mentioned, for instance, where the Gothic style seems to have lingered to an unconscionably late date. The buildings at first sight appear to have been

erected during the latter part of the fifteenth century, but a closer inspection, confirmed in many cases by actual dates, proves them to belong to the post-Gothic period, some being as late as the middle of the seventeenth.

One of the causes of our paucity of knowledge respecting furniture of the Middle Ages is the free, not to say fantastic, manner in which objects of domestic use were often rendered by the early artists. It is not until the latter end of the fourteenth century is reached that we can form any comprehensive idea as regards structural form from illustrations. We can trace the likeness of such fifteenth-century furniture as we possess to representations of similar pieces abundantly illustrated in manuscripts of this period. These indeed, are generally depicted with scrupulous care and fidelity, but it would be difficult to imagine actual examples corresponding with some of the extraordinary anomalies appearing in early artistic efforts. The greater accuracy of pictures in manuscripts made during the fifteenth century was due in a measure to a certain increase in the knowledge of perspective, added to which buildings and articles of furniture were undoubtedly in many cases drawn from the objects themselves. The illustrations to Froissart's 'Chronicles' in our British Museum, and the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, executed by a Fleming residing in France during the reign of Louis XI., are often marvellous in their minute representations of detail—witness the scene depicting the death of Count

Gaston de Foix, where the apartment of the inn, with its table and its credence perforated with Gothic designs, is rendered so faithfully that we could have no better record of the appointments of the place. It is noteworthy that these illustrations, as was invariably the case with medieval pictures, represented the fashions and customs of the age in which they were produced, and not those of Froissart's time. As regards English pictorial art, Lydgate's 'Life of St. Edmund,' also in the British Museum, contains several remarkable illustrations, one of which, the well-known 'Birth of St. Edmund,' is quite astonishing in its representations of bedroom furniture and appointments of the period. This picture is frequently cited as an authority.

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the costume of the figures which appear on buildings, as well as on chests and other articles of furniture, affords most valuable evidence of the actual date of production. Unfortunately, in England we have no furniture dating from an earlier period than the latter part of the fourteenth century on which carved figures appear, while specimens of later date are very scarce.* The tilting coffers, mentioned in Chapter VII., with their display of armour, costume, and accessories, constitute most

* This, of course, does not include church fittings, amongst which a few instances may perhaps be found.

A very early box exhibiting tilting knights, carved in small oblong compartments, has, I am informed, been recently discovered in the outhouse of an old garden. This relic is said to date from the end of the thirteenth century.

valuable evidences of the secular form of decoration practised at the latter end of the fourteenth century, but the number of such pieces in this country is unfortunately so limited that the record is woefully incomplete. A very remarkable painted coffer exists in Newport Church, Essex, which is more fully described later on, but in this particular instance the date is supplied by the architectural style, the figures being merely monkish portrayals of the evangelists in conventional costume.

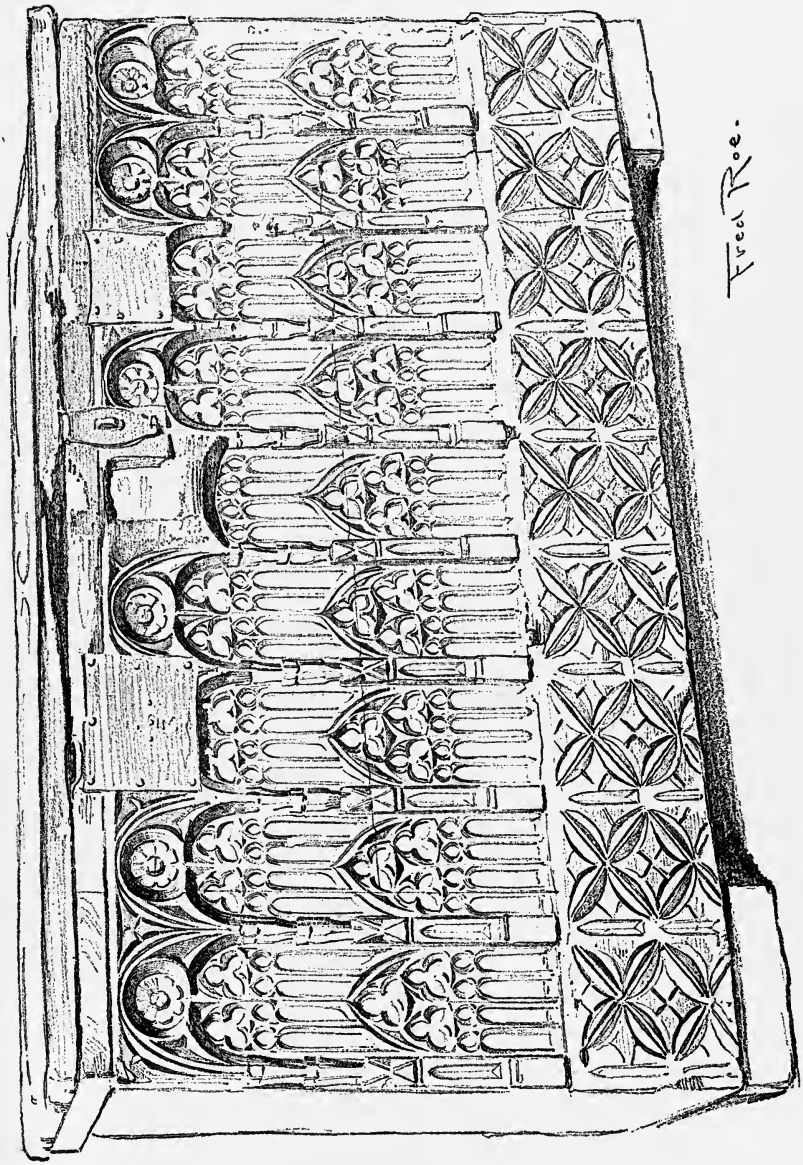
To return to the Gothic styles. In chests the earliest carved decoration is almost invariably incised, the tracery very rarely being in relief. This, however, was not the case with other articles of furniture, for we find that the earliest chairs and tables that we possess are elaborately carved with mouldings and tracery in relief. There seems to have been a strange recurrent fashion or predilection for Scandinavian designs, for we find English coffers of the thirteenth century decorated with curious whorls or roundels filled with geometrical patterns in the Scandinavian style; and this taste cropped up again both in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is strange that this liking for Northern design should have manifested itself at various times after the lapse of equal periods of 200 years. The geometrical patterns in these three several periods are identical, and it is only by a study of the construction of the article which they decorate that their proper dates can be ascertained.

One of the great beauties of the Gothic, or Pointed,

styles is that two pieces were very seldom made alike. Each reproduction was a separate work, like a masterpiece of architecture or painting, exhibiting the producer's individuality, and was very rarely repeated without some appreciable variation. In later periods—the Jacobean, for instance, furniture of a set type was turned out by the hundred, though not so plentifully as would be the case nowadays. But with the earlier styles each piece was more or less unique. An instance can be found, however, in which three Gothic chests of late fourteenth-century workmanship, and of the very finest character, are identical in their design and treatment. These are to be seen at Faversham, Rainham, and St. John's Hospital, Canterbury, and are no doubt the work of some Kentish cofferer or cabinet-maker of the period. I could instance many other examples in which the designs have a great similarity, but it is seldom indeed that a case of such close identity can be discovered as that observable in these three Kentish chests.

Many of the early Gothic chests and armories were destitute of carving, but were nevertheless decorated with a profusion of scroll work in iron, which served the double purpose of strengthening and beautifying the object to which it was applied. A chest in the Victoria and Albert Museum is a fine example of this type, and a very similar specimen in much better preservation — indeed, remaining in a most perfect state—is in the Hôtel Carnavalet in Paris.

Although in such a treatise as this one cannot enter




FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN FAVERSHAM CHURCH, KENT
One of the earliest buttressed coffers remaining in England

into a long description of the three periods of English Gothic, some acquaintance with the principles of the Gothic Pointed styles of architecture is absolutely necessary for the student before he can even conjecture the date of any piece of furniture made before the classic revival. The three principles which are best and most easily learned are : the lancet-shaped windows of the thirteenth century, or Early English style ; the flowing geometrical tracery of the fourteenth century, or Decorated period ; and the vertical tracery of the fifteenth century, or Perpendicular style. This is but a mere skeleton guide, for a multitude of other characteristics require to be filled in, and it must always be remembered that, whereas the decoration of the sumptuous and magnificent furniture of the upper classes followed closely the developments of the architectural style in vogue, the rougher productions of the more humble class clung to the old traditions of the previous style. The craftsman of repute, the best of his class in the early days, would probably be employed by rich customers to produce the finest specimen of his art that money could obtain. Though we have no knowledge of the names of any of these craftsmen, there is no doubt that in their own times they individually possessed a wide reputation. On the other hand, the expense of employing them would be proportionate, and beyond the means of the yeoman or farmer who merely required a hutch for his victuals. These worthies would be satisfied with the work of the local carpenter, who was probably a good deal

behind the times, both in the matter of decorative design and in its execution.

In the first two styles of Gothic architecture we possess scarcely any specimens at all of domestic art, a few examples of chairs or benches which will be duly noticed in their proper chapter being only fragments of ecclesiastical fittings. These examples are so excessively scarce that it rarely falls to the collector's lot to acquire a specimen. Indeed, Gothic furniture is now so scarce in England that it seldom comes into the market. This is sometimes the connoisseur's chance, for dealers have hardly yet learned to appreciate such rarities properly, while the number of collectors who possess expert knowledge and appreciation of Gothic furniture may perhaps be counted on the fingers of the two hands. This may be attributed in some measure to the remoteness of the possibility of acquiring it.

Early furniture in England was constructed in a very solid and weighty fashion, as we know from the numerous coffers which abound in churches throughout the kingdom. We believe, from what we know of French furniture of the thirteenth century, that it followed on almost identical lines to similar pieces made in England. A century or so later, however, marked differences manifested themselves in the respective national methods of construction, the English developing a purely original form of decoration, and still adhering to their old heavy material and joinery, while the French and Flemish, whose elaborate flamboyant

was in great measure only a reflex of the Decorated style of England, improved their methods of construction so vastly that the whole character of their furniture acquired a lightness we seldom find in English work of the period. The few examples of furniture for domestic use which remain to us of English work of the fifteenth century depend mainly for beauty upon the charming effect of their structural lines and the simplicity of their workmanship, rather than upon any surface decoration in the shape of carving. It may be this simplicity which has led to the destruction of similar pieces by the ignorant, while less pure and over-decorated specimens of a later time have been preserved. The common mind tends to associate value and beauty with an excess of frills and trimmings, and this may account for the excessive rarity of pre-Reformation domestic furniture. What the large cupboards of the fifteenth century were like may be learned from a solitary armory which remains in York Cathedral. The top is battlemented, the hinges are strap-shaped, and the arrangement of doors or shutters is very irregular. This irregularity is a distinctive and very pleasing feature of Gothic work, and is in itself an evidence of higher imaginative capacity than goes to produce an object of that absolute regularity of design which would seem to have been a weakness of later periods.

Another reason may perhaps be advanced to account for the exceptional rarity of articles of the fifteenth century. Nearly all of the second half of that period

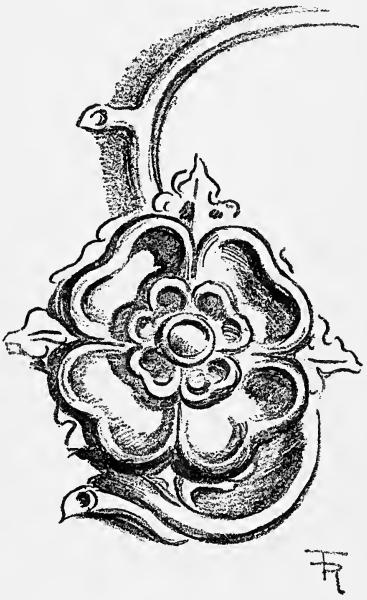
was occupied by the English people in internecine warfare of a most sanguinary character, which destroyed in a great measure the arts of peace. Between the first battle of St. Albans and the conflict on Bosworth Field some fourteen pitched battles were fought, exclusive of smaller frays and petty skirmishes, and it is probable that the number of those who actually perished in the larger conflicts alone is rather over than under 100,000. Not only was it the bone and muscle of England that was decimated ; there probably never was another war fought where so many of the wealthy nobility fell. Contrary to the usual custom of the Middle Ages, on many occasions the winning side received orders to spare the common soldiers, but slay the leaders, and those who escaped were for the most part irreparably ruined. Thus, the dissolution of great fortunes and estates impoverished the very class best able to afford the luxuries of existence. These several causes had their effect upon production. It is true that many handicrafts were still carried on with patient industry, but even these were affected by the tremendous conflict which raged throughout the country, and manufactures languished. This no doubt is the real cause why such a poverty of furniture typical of fifteenth-century work is to be found in England at the present day, compared with that of other periods, and the greater number of remaining specimens emanate from conventional sources.

At the conclusion of the wars, while England lay exhausted from her internal struggle, Flemish aptitude

for business discovered in our shores an opening for Flemish wares, and articles of furniture, especially chests, were imported in such numbers that our craftsmen could make no headway against the competition. and Acts were accordingly passed at various times to restrict the importation. Whether these Acts fulfilled their purpose or not, it cannot be denied that an immense quantity of Flemish work must have been imported. In different parts of the country, even as far as the extreme West of England, we find chests still existing of flamboyant design and foreign workmanship, while old records frequently mention these by the name of Flanders chests, much in the same way as modern inventories would include Turkey carpets. Some of these Flemish chests may have been made in England by Flemish workmen from their own designs, and would still, notwithstanding this, be correctly designated as Flanders chests. It will be seen, therefore, how necessary it is to have a proper acquaintance with architectural styles in order to be able to assign to any given piece of furniture its true source and approximate date. Were the importance of this kind of knowledge duly recognised, there would be fewer errors in descriptions of Gothic and Renaissance furniture.

In treating of the decoration of early furniture, we frequently find that a conventional form of rose is introduced, and this, representing as it does the national emblem of England, has passed through so many types that a few words on it may be interesting to the connoisseur.

The earliest type of rose, which we find upon coffers as far back as the thirteenth century, seems to have been formed by a succession of concentric rings divided up by notches into petals in rather an aimless manner. In later Gothic times, however, some significance may be found in the more thoughtfully-developed form of the flower. It has been asserted, and with some show of truth, that the roses produced during the reigns of Henry V., VI., VII., and VIII. exhibit a number of petals corresponding with the distinguishing number of the reigning monarch. This is an interesting, but by no means an infallible, distinction. I have examined roses carved on buildings and pieces of furniture throughout the whole of the 150 years covered by the reigns of the monarchs referred to; and though in some cases the theory is supported by the number of petals on the rose, in others no correspondence exists.* The favourite form seems to



ROSE FROM MISERERE SEAT, AYLESBURY CHURCH, BUCKS

* The roses on the real and sovereign of Henry VII. do not possess more than five petals each, and other instances exist which tend to disprove this theory. The four-petalled rose is seldom depicted.

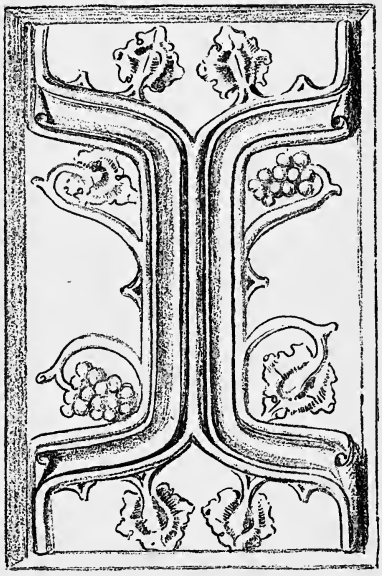
have possessed an uneven number of petals, thus presenting an irregularity of scheme dear to the hearts of the early designers.

The use of the rose in decoration was common throughout England during the latter part of the fifteenth century, and there is little doubt from traces which we find that these roses were coloured, probably in accordance with the political opinions of the families who owned them. When the parties were united in the persons of Henry VII. and Elizabeth of York, both colours were variously used on the same flower, sometimes one ring of petals in red enclosing another ring in white, or *vice versâ*; or, again, as in the case of the badges exhibited in the windows of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, the rose was divided by a vertical line, one division being coloured white and the other red. The marguerite, or daisy, was also used in decoration, occasionally as a punning rebus upon the name of Margaret of Anjou, Henry VII.'s Queen.

It is to be hoped that the collector may happen to come across some of the good things bearing the badges or decorations we have mentioned in this chapter. If he does we can sincerely wish him joy, for they are excessively rare.

The decadence of the Gothic style gave birth to two features which require special mention. These were the fluted pattern popularly known as the linen panel, and the peculiar combination of scrolls which has been termed by the French *parchemin*. In my volume on

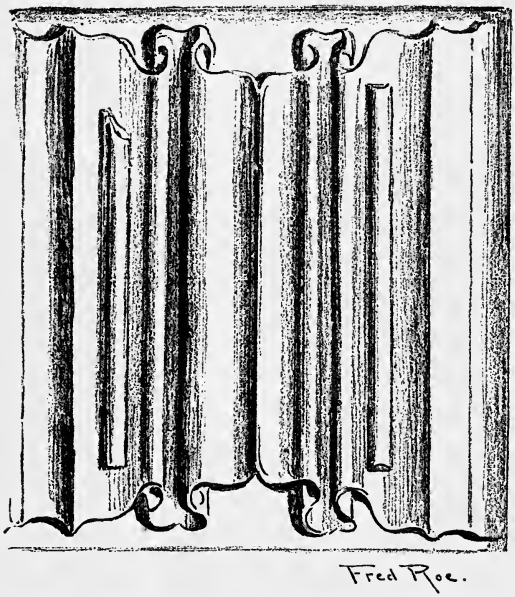
'Ancient Coffers and Cupboards' I have dealt fully with the first form of decoration, and have endeavoured to trace its origin. Briefly, I may here say that this pattern originated in France, where we find indications of it as early as about 1460. The meaning of this decoration, if it ever had any, is now lost in obscurity. The theory that it was merely used as a symbol to indicate the contents of a receptacle is now an exploded one, for some of the earliest manuscript paintings in which it is depicted represent the linen panel as appearing on the sides of pulpits and other pieces of furniture which could not possibly have been used to contain linen.



PARCHEMIN PANEL, END OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY

At the time of writing a linen-panelled pulpit, a most beautiful specimen of late fifteenth or early sixteenth century work, which for many years was hidden in one of the recesses of Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster, has been brought to light and re-instated in its place in the nave. It is said that Archbishop Cranmer preached from this pulpit at both the coronation and funeral of Edward VI. Probably

the earliest linen panels which we possess in England are those which adorn the beautiful oak screens separating the chapels from the ambulatory on the north side of the choir of Lincoln Cathedral. These screens are locally said to have been erected during the early part of the fifteenth century, but this is no doubt an error. They can, however, hardly be of a later date than the early part of Henry VII.'s reign, as the purity of the Perpendicular Gothic tracery in the same screens demonstrates.




LINEN PANEL, FROM CUPBOARD REPUTED TO HAVE COME FROM PLESSIS LES TOURS
In the possession of Guy F. Laking, Esq., M.V.O.

Although the Flemish and German types of linen panelling are usually more ornate and fanciful, some of the examples of British origin are of singularly rich design. Some of the finest English panelling of this description can be seen at Abington Abbey, near Northampton; D'Arcy Hall, Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Essex; Crowhurst Place, Surrey; The Vyne, Basingstoke; and a few fragmentary but

exceptionally beautiful specimens at Rye House, Hertfordshire. There are also some excellent examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum and Hampton Court Palace. On some of the most typically English coffers and cupboards which exhibit this decoration we find that the top and bottom of the linen fold are embellished on the centre ridge with a lightly-incised cross—evidence in itself of pre-Reformation origin. I do not pretend to say that Continental examples were not decorated in the same manner, but there is no doubt that this fashion was more in vogue in England than it was in other countries. Occasionally linen panels were further decorated by augmentations in the shape of tassels and representations of conventional fruit and flowers; but these additions may be considered as mere trimmings, in no way affecting the character of the linen fold.

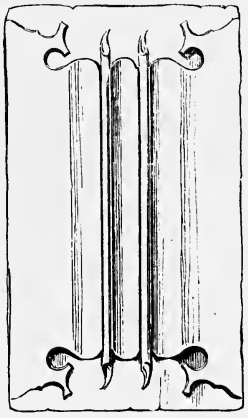
We do not always find that cupboards, chests, and other pieces of furniture are panelled throughout with linen fold of one pattern. The end panels are frequently of a plainer character than those in front. It is, however, possible to find cabinets and cupboards of fifteenth-century work which have elaborate linen panels at the sides, while the doors or shutters in the front remain absolutely plain and unadorned. This at first sight may seem very singular and opposed to reason, but the true explanation of the matter is this: These plain doors were probably, when first made, covered with a coat of gesso, upon which was painted *in tempera* some religious or heraldic design. This, in

the course of time, became damaged or defaced, and was at last removed, leaving the ends more ornate than the front. It is true that the linen panels themselves were occasionally painted and gilded, for specimens are known remaining in this state; but in this case the painting would be on the surface of the wood, without the intervention of gesso. Some of our church screens, such as Southwold, in Suffolk, and Harberton, Devon, afford very valuable examples of what the surface decoration of fifteenth-century furniture may have been like. This linen-fold decoration passed through a variety of beautiful forms, and its last debased successors finally disappeared about the beginning of the seventeenth century. I have several times heard it argued by superficial observers that the linen was always placed so that the folds fell vertically, and that such pieces of furniture as have the decoration placed horizontally have been made up at a later period. I have only to refer those who hold this theory to the original drawing by Holbein of the More family in Basle Museum. In this the lobby is depicted as having linen panels placed horizontally, while the sideboard in the same room has them placed vertically.

Of the *parchemin* panel, the theory of evolution suggests the origin. It may be, in some measure, a late outcome of such tracery as appears in the porch of Aldham Church, Essex, or it may have been brought about by the lettered scrolls held by saints and other figures employed in ecclesiastical art. The appellation obviously suggests the possibility of this.

The beautiful scroll forms which it adopts are embellished more or less with cusping and conventional floral decoration. The adjacent borders of the scrolls are occasionally made to intertwine—a detail more usually observable on Flemish and German examples, but which may be seen in its very finest form on a typically English room full of panelling, in Abington Hall, near Northampton. Thoresby College, at King's Lynn, Norfolk, still possesses its original great door—a fine, massive piece of work, decorated with *parchemin* panels, and it is worth mentioning that this edifice, though actually in course of construction, was not finished in 1510, as the will of Thomas Thoresby, its founder, shows.

It is curious and worthy of notice that the linen and *parchemin* forms of decoration, although purely Gothic, did not make their appearance until the Gothic *régime* was coming to an end.



LINEN PANEL, HAMPTON COURT

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RENAISSANCE—AND AFTER

DURING the reign of the last Henry so many foreign features were introduced into English furniture that inexperienced people frequently assign a Continental origin to almost every piece of this date. A common mistake is to attribute anything not quite understood to Italian provenance. Italian design, however, does not necessarily mean Italian origin, for the influence of that country pervaded our own English productions as well as those of our Continental neighbours. The styles of the greater part of Europe were revolutionized as a consequence of the French victories in Italy, and in a great measure nations ceased to think for themselves. As Victor Hugo, speaking of the Renaissance, so neatly put it, 'Instead of being Gallican, European, indigenous, Art becomes Greek and Roman; instead of being true and modern, it is pseudo-antique.' And yet, while being led, so to speak, each nation expressed itself by subtle differences. To discover signs of decoration in the Italian taste on furniture of the sixteenth century by no means proves that the article had even a Continental

origin. British nationality in such pieces may be decided by many things—for example, by the handling of the carver, boldness of execution often degenerating into roughness; by the shape of the structure itself; and frequently by the pertinacity with which our craftsmen adhered to the ponderous Gothic styles. There is no doubt that a great many foreigners were employed in this country up to the end of Henry VIII.'s reign, and their influence on the works of the period is conspicuous; yet it is quite possible to distinguish between the furniture made by Englishmen and that produced by foreign workmen residing in this country, although proceeding on almost exactly the same lines. Along with the increased skill of English craftsmen, the agitation against foreigners, which had made itself manifest from time to time in attempts to drive them from their employment in this country, grew, and so, after the first half of the century, we do not find Continental influence nearly so marked in English productions, which in many respects possess an originality of their own, quite unlike anything of Continental make. It is worthy of remark that the known names of the makers of furniture in England previous to the eighteenth century are very few, and by far the greater number are foreign.

Examples of English furniture of the first half of the sixteenth century are by no means common. To a great extent they had lost neither their Gothic outline nor certain Gothic elements in their decoration. In a way the art of the locksmith would appear to have

lagged behind, for chests, cupboards, and other receptacles made during the Early Renaissance often have locks and lock-plates of a distinctly anterior type attached. The custom which prevailed during Gothic and Early Renaissance times of stretching or pinning scarlet cloth under the hinges and other ironwork of coffers and cupboards deserves notice. A similar practice which obtained as regards the external doors of buildings is said by some to have originated in the gruesome custom which at one time prevailed of exhibiting the flayed skins of invading Danes or other unhappy beings, the iron scrollwork being applied not only to affix, but also to preserve, the ghastly trophy. Whether there is any connection between the two fashions or not can now only be a matter of conjecture. It is certain, however, that the application of red material in the manner described to locks and hinges of cupboards and chests became in the fifteenth century pretty general all over the Continent, and there are innumerable specimens of ancient receptacles in French, Flemish, and German museums on which fragments of red cloth and velvet may yet be seen showing through the pierced ironwork.

The interlacing of the late Gothic and Early Ranaissance styles is perhaps most strikingly shown in some French and Flemish articles of furniture, in which decoration in the new style is lavishly applied to the old Gothic outline. Such curiously beautiful examples of fitted furniture as the parclose screen, in Holbeton Church, Devonshire, or the screen in the cathedral at

Evreux, could be studied with much profit; whilst an immense fund of information on the blending of the styles may be derived from a survey of the Church of St. Eustache, in Paris. Not only did the styles blend, but, whilst in the history of art differing styles have frequently been practised simultaneously during a period of transition, in the case of the Renaissance this dual fashion was very strongly marked. We have evidence of this in the illustrated literature of the times. Two instances may be cited: firstly, in Sir Anthony Fitzherbert's 'Boke of Surveying,' printed by Thomas Paston and dated July 15, 1523; amongst other woodcuts is a representation of a tenant paying rent. Although a round-top doorway appears in the background of this picture, the furniture of the room, a settle and a table, is of Gothic character, the settle being surmounted by a poppy-head. To balance this, we find that in Henry VIII.'s own Psalter is a painted illustration which depicts with the greatest minuteness the monarch, using as a rest for his harp a classic coffer of the Italian *cassone* type, evidently the newest thing in the taste of the time. In each of these illustrations the artist doubtless drew precisely the sort of furniture which he was accustomed to see every day amongst the surroundings he represented. The illustrations to the Psalter were executed by a Court painter, and hence the obvious difference between the appointments shown in the two scenes, fashion, as ever, moving with the wealthy Court. It may be argued that the furniture in the rent-collector's office

was drawn from articles actually belonging to an earlier period, but it is well known that medieval artists always represented the fashion of their times, or, at least, the fashion of the circle in which they moved.

It is curious to find that the severely classic style, with round arch and fluted pilasters on the panelling, came into vogue in some cases at startlingly early dates, while the pointed arch, with its Gothic tracery, was being carried on in the immediate vicinity with scarcely a sign of change. At the Cross Keys Hotel at Saffron Walden is an inlaid classic panel dated 1569, and of style which might be readily mistaken for work of the middle of the seventeenth century, while on Market Hill, in the same town, is a huge timber house with traceried windows and a pointed door, which to lovers of architecture is deeply interesting, as showing that the fusion of the Gothic and Renaissance styles, or rather the replacement of one by the other, was accomplished only with great difficulty. What has actually happened is this: the house has been doubtless enlarged at various periods, the earliest portion, which exhibits some very good Perpendicular windows with oak mullions, bearing the veritable date of 1600 carved on its woodwork, actually thirty years later than the classic panel in the Cross Keys. Then follows an extension, bearing the date 1625, in which certain features in the decoration of the earlier part are fairly adhered to, though with more recent developments in detail. Again comes a later extension, dated

COFFER CARVED WITH DOLPHINS AND SHIELD, TEMP. HENRY VIII

1676, this portion exhibiting some gigantic figures with long-skirted coats and square, high-heeled shoes worked on the pargeting.

Even the novice can hardly help remarking how frequently conventional representations of the dolphin appear among the decorations of furniture made during the first half of the sixteenth century. Its use may be an echo of heathen mythology, or merely attributable perhaps to the adaptability of the form to decorative purposes. The most probable explanation of the use of this device, however, is that it became popular in England after the meeting of the English and French monarchs at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, the dolphin being primarily adopted by our own designers as a compliment to the alliance between the two nations. In the arabesques which were employed in the surface decoration during the early Renaissance the dolphin finds a place that appears almost natural, so admirably is its form adapted to the associated ornament, for the so-called arabesques of the Renaissance differ from their Arabian prototypes by introducing the animal form forbidden by the Mohammedan religion.

The peculiar aspect of the wood in certain old pieces of furniture has given rise to the theory, advanced by even serious men, that the material was not sawn or planed, but was split from the heart of the tree by means of iron wedges. It would, however, be obviously impossible to split heart of oak into such shapes as would be required by any method approach-

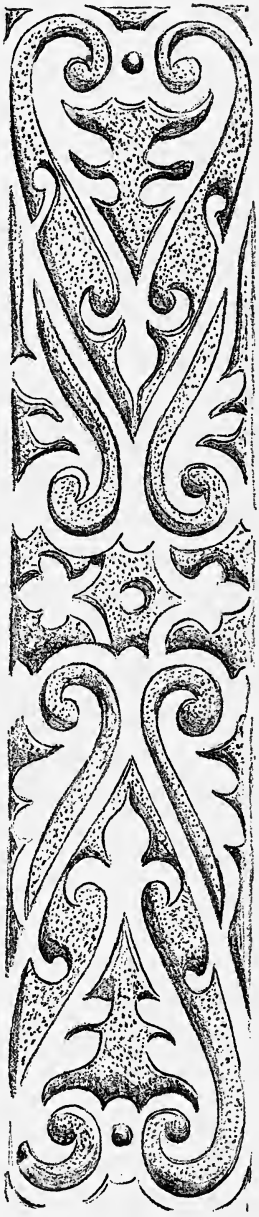
ing to this. We have no knowledge of the genesis of the plane, but one thing is certain : mouldings in early furniture were assuredly not worked complete with such planes as we know now, the unevenness of the members plainly proving this. Linen panelling is nowadays manufactured by the mile, being run out in vast lengths, cut up into sections, and the ends of the drapery then added. In the early days we are speaking of every hollow and bead had to be worked out by itself, giving a much greater freedom of handling.

It is not until we reach the period coeval with the reign of Elizabeth that we are able to find chairs, chests, cupboards, and other pieces of furniture in sufficient numbers to come within the scope of the ordinary collector. There is no doubt that internal trade and manufactures increased enormously during the reign of Elizabeth. The devastating effect of the Wars of the Roses had entirely died out, and the rapidly-growing population had settled down to peaceful arts and the luxuries attendant upon increased wealth. I am myself inclined to the belief that the growing use of brick, instead of timber and plaster, for the purposes of domestic architecture is to some extent responsible for the better preservation of Elizabethan houses and their contents.

Although the origin of the Elizabethan style was classical, there is no getting over the fact that its characteristics were often nondescript. Its classicalism was less pure than that of the early Renaissance that preceded it or the Jacobean that followed it. Some

of its idiosyncrasies are purely national inventions, and cannot be traced to any prior source. It is difficult to explain the origin of certain details which came into prominence in design during the latter half of the sixteenth century—such, for example, as the strap moulding. The carved frieze in the dining-room at Haddon Hall, executed in Henry VIII.'s reign, exhibits some very delicate and beautiful specimens of the earliest form of interlaced strap, the development of which, later on, became extremely popular.

The art of inlaying with coloured wood was extensively practised during this period upon the finer productions of the craftsman. This art does not appear to have been adopted in England before the Renaissance, and when first used in this country frequently took the form of covering bare, flat surfaces with a monotonous diaper



STRAP CARVING, FROM A CABINET, DATED 1594

of design. It is astonishing how ugly and inartistic inlaid wood may be made. The true function of colour is to give expression and relief to form, and unless inlay is employed as an adjunct to carving, the effect bears some analogy to sauces without meat.

The pointed arch was occasionally used in the decoration of woodwork during Henry VIII.'s time, though it was, to a certain extent, unfashionable; but when Mary came to the throne it seems to have become almost entirely superseded by the round arch, which, however, was occasionally flanked by Gothic spandrills. A singular form of strap moulding may also be found somewhat resembling in design the SS collar. This description of strapwork is one of the rarest forms of decoration on Elizabethan furniture. The single and double guilloche was also freely used. In late Gothic times a species of diaper, formed by intersecting circles, was used for decorating furniture, and in the course of development the designer abandoned a portion of these circles, with their accompanying leafwork or cusping, leaving only the old sinuous ornament of Romanesque times, which thus becomes one of the commonest forms of decoration during the Jacobean period. It must always be borne in mind that the rough farmhouse dresser adorned with pewter plates which our art students affect nowadays in no way resembles the splendid productions made for the mansions of Leicester or Bess of Hardwick. There is a popular impression among certain classes that old things must necessarily be

good. The jerry-builder, however, is not exclusively a modern production any more than his counterpart in the furniture trade. The finest productions of the old makers and the coarser counterparts of the same period bear in a way an analogy to the manufactures of the modern makers.

The diamond, or lozenge, which we so often find carved on the backs of chairs and panels of chests and cupboards, is also a feature of this style. It may be generally considered a late characteristic of Renaissance decoration, seldom appearing as early as the reign of Elizabeth, being more often associated with Cromwellian and even later times. I have seen a chair of late appearance with the diamond on its back panel and dated a few years after the middle of the sixteenth century, but I have very strong doubts as to whether the date was authentic, though the chair itself was undoubtedly genuine.

We frequently find in Jacobean pieces of furniture that the edges of certain portions, such as the sides of chair seats or the edges of styles, are decorated with a small scoop moulding, presenting a serrated appearance. This feature would appear to have come into vogue during the reign of Elizabeth, when it was but sparingly used. It was, however, not unknown in earlier times, for some few late Gothic pieces remain which exhibit this characteristic. It was a cheap and easy method of ornamentation, and to this is due the fact that in later times, towards the end of the Jacobean period, it was employed to a degree that became

perfectly monstrous, often excluding the finer details of surface decoration.

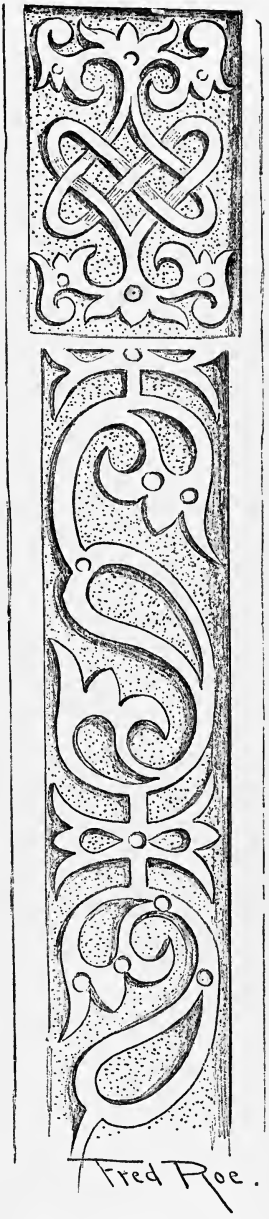
Old furniture with dates carved thereon is always specially interesting, and usually commands higher prices than similar specimens which have no distinguishing dates. It is exceedingly rare to find an example of any description of furniture incised with dates earlier than the reign of Elizabeth, and most of those which exist belong to the latter half of the seventeenth century, or even later. Two chairs which I have noticed were dated as recently as 1792, which may be considered as the very end of what is known as the oak period, mahogany and other woods having then been in vogue for many years. During the seventeenth century many new types of furniture came into fashion—such, for instance, as the long dresser and what is now known as the chest of drawers. The latter were not unknown in Elizabeth's days, but they were of smaller size, and approximated more to the cabinet or secretaire. The 'runners' in old drawers are mostly formed of broad grooves in the sides of the drawers themselves, a corresponding flange of wood being fixed on the interior surface of the chest for them to bear upon. This detail is usually unnoticed or ignored by the forgers of antique furniture, who generally adopt the simpler device of a lateral widening of the bottom of the drawer.

Furniture of the Jacobean period frequently possesses an architectural character in its design, pilasters, pediments, and perspective views on the panels forming

distinctive features, and in these the simple classic taste is strongly observable, the finest pieces being remarkable for the justness of their proportions. In Elizabeth's time the panels of such articles as chests and cupboards were mostly remarkable for their small size, while the mouldings around them were often deep and wide. In the Stuart period, on the other hand, the panels became much larger, while the mouldings were reduced, becoming mere fillets of flattened ogee moulding, and sometimes being dispensed with altogether.

It is extremely interesting to trace the developments in furniture towards the close of and after the reign of Elizabeth—the mingling of the pilaster with the melon bulb, or the remains of it; the degeneration of such details as strapwork; the growth towards severity which took place during the Commonwealth; and the free adoption of the Dutch style after the Restoration. These changes may be more readily traced by the student than those in earlier styles from the mere fact that examples of English oak of these later periods are numerous, and afford an infinite fund of decorative variations. The affectation of the Dutch Renaissance which Charles II. brought over from Holland is a frequent source of error on the part of those who are not thoroughly conversant with the subject. English furniture of the latter part of the seventeenth century exhibiting foreign inclinations is not necessarily to be referred to foreign origin any more than the earlier examples already referred to. It is well known that

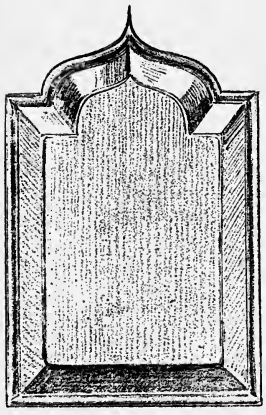
the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 drove numbers of the best foreign craftsmen to these shores. The Dutch fashion, however, was so popular that no opening appears to have been found for the exercise of French influence as far as furniture was concerned. One of the features of the imported Dutch Renaissance was the liberal use of inlay in such materials as ivory, ebony, and mother-o'-pearl, accompanied by the profuse application of ebonized oblong bosses of the jewel type. Pieces of furniture embellished in this manner are mostly dated in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Charles II. brought the fashion over from the Hague, and for a brief period it reigned supreme. Furniture of a plainer type about this time often exhibited a conventional representation of the tulip amongst its carvings—a reminiscence of the tulipomania which pervaded Holland. This floral emblem, however, is often the only connection between the two styles




STRAP CARVING, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

of furniture which were being contemporaneously carried on. The plate, representing an oak desk carved with the tulip, and bearing the legend 'ROBERT BAKER, 1660,' which appears in the chapter on 'Furniture with Secret Hiding-places,' should be compared with the *frontispiece*, showing the beautiful inlaid example, dated 1661.

It is from the reign of Charles II. that we date the introduction of light soft-wood furniture. Its greater adaptability to the handling of the carver speedily made the softer material fashionable, whilst its popularity was also assisted by the vast loads of timber which were shipped over from the shores of the Baltic to make good speedily the havoc wrought by the great Fire of London. It is even asserted, though I cannot pretend to say with what truth, that a certain unpopular insect which nowadays bears the honoured name of one of our oldest titled families came over with the white wood, and, unfortunately, came to stay, and that its uncomfortable presence in England before this date was unknown.



OGEE-TOPPED PANEL, LATE SEVENTEENTH OR EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A raised surface in the centre of the panel was much in vogue during the latter part of the seventeenth century, and many of Wren's City churches exhibit

this feature in such fittings as their pews, pulpits, and wainscotting. In West-Country cupboards, chests, and settles, dating from the commencement of the succeeding epoch, such panels were frequently headed with an ogee-shaped arch, a curious reintroduction of a Gothic feature.

During the seventeenth century distinctive local types of furniture began to spring into existence. Traces of these differences of type are to a great extent becoming lost, and yearly become more difficult to detect, owing to the removal of pieces from one part of the kingdom to another through sales or change of residence.* One of these local types is the Welsh sideboard or buffet, which attains to the height of three stories, the upper story consisting of a shelf supported by pillars. This emanated almost exclusively from Wales or places on the Welsh border, such as Shrewsbury. From this part of the country likewise comes the high-backed dresser. Dressers of different decorative types may be found all over the kingdom, but those with the superstructure of shelves at the back

* Local individualities, which have now disappeared, were common amongst most handicrafts in England during the seventeenth century. The discernment of the Charmouth blacksmith regarding the shoeing of Lord Wilmot's horse during King Charles II.'s flight from Worcester is a striking instance of the readiness with which such county differences were once recognised. 'Lord Wilmot's horse had to be shod ere he could depart, and the blacksmith, . . . noting that the three remaining shoes had been put on in different counties lying around Worcester, pointed it out to the ostler, whose suspicions had already been aroused by the mysterious proceedings of the guests at the inn. . . .'—'The Flight of the King,' by Allan Fea.

may usually be traced to the West of England. In Yorkshire and Lancashire, again, we have the excessively high-backed chair—a most uncomfortable piece of furniture, which was certainly not made even so far south as the Midlands.

A peculiarity that we find in the Eastern Midlands is the studding of chests with the date and the initials of the reigning monarch in brass or gilt nails. Such initials were sometimes incised and inlaid with lead or pewter, but, though this may have been a local peculiarity, I have not succeeded in identifying it with any particular district. On the investigation of these local types a volume in itself might be written—or might have been some forty years ago, for the conditions of modern life have tended to obliterate the evidence, and what could now be brought together only with infinite pains would hardly be conclusive.

The use of the wood of the pear-tree, followed by mahogany, had already at the commencement of the eighteenth century made oak somewhat unfashionable, but its use still lingered, though it can scarcely be said to have any individual features characteristic of the period. The latest types of old oak are not very interesting, as they are for the most part very degenerate in design and nondescript in style. The mouldings, if any, are flat and meaningless, and the proportions of panels not infrequently bad, while the decoration, when it exists, seems to have been only some weak attempt to imitate a bygone style, to which, at a little distance, the piece seems to belong. A closer examination of

such pieces usually discovers essential differences in detail from the style imitated. Eighteenth-century specimens are frequently dated in bold characters, but the poverty of the detail is such that dates are not needed to enable the connoisseur to decide the lateness of their origin. I have myself seen an oak coffer carved with the most extraordinary Gothic arcading, in the centre of which was the representation of a human figure under a canopy. The sight of this at a little distance would have induced one to believe that a veritable treasure had been discovered, but a nearer inspection disclosed a date somewhere in the eighteenth century, together with the fact that the figure wore a three-cornered hat, a wide-skirted coat, and high-heeled shoes. I do not believe that this absurdity was due to the Strawberry Hill Gothic taste of Horace Walpole. It was the production of some artisan living in some out-of-the-way rural district who knew nothing of fashions in architecture, and had possibly never seen any building of a considerable size except his village church. In fact, it was a survival and not a revival. It is only fair to say, however, that such combinations as these are rare, the oak carving of the Georgian period being generally a bastard representation of Elizabethan or Stuart design.

Allied to this particular class of furniture are many of the pieces which originally emanated from the northernmost counties of England, and on which, during long winter evenings, the isolated farmer or yeoman amused himself by carving roughly-executed

designs, bearing a faint resemblance to some decorative style previously in vogue. These are the pieces which the true connoisseur discards or passes by. They have no real decorative importance, and but little intrinsic value.

There has been, and is, a considerable difference of opinion as to whether the surface of the wood during the olden time was left in its natural state, or whether it was waxed or polished by any artificial means. There is little doubt that, during Gothic times, carved woodwork was painted in bright colours to heighten its effect, though very, very few specimens have come down to us in this state at the present day. In Tudor or Stuart times, however, the case was entirely different, and while some believe in the application of such substances as beeswax and turpentine, or linseed oil, others maintain that the wood was left in a dry, untouched state. My own opinion, based on careful inspection of well-preserved specimens, which have never lost their original surface through painting and pickling, is that woodwork, certainly after the Reformation, was generally brightened with a very thin coat of clear varnish, wax or linseed oil being afterwards employed as a polish. This will sound like rank heresy in the opinion of many, but I believe it, nevertheless, to be the fact. The wonderful luminosity of the surface of the best-preserved pieces requires something more than even centuries of wax rubbing to account for it. Traces of very old varnish which would naturally form an excellent foundation for any

subsequent polish are distinctly visible beneath the superficial gloss.

Touching once more on the subject of popular fallacies. Those attached to furniture of the seventeenth century are very numerous, and often as circumstantial in their details as they are absurd. In Shakespeare's house in Stratford-on-Avon this is exemplified in the many anachronisms which it contains. Some chairs and a sideboard, or dresser, of late seventeenth-century date, which were perhaps made for the house, and have actually existed in it since their manufacture, have been gravely regarded as having been used by the great poet himself. In view of the elaborate and minute investigations which have taken place in recent years into the writings of Shakespeare, and into the history of his life, it seems to me extraordinary that the authenticity of the so-called Shakespearian relics should only recently have been openly called in question. In the autumn of the year 1903 public interest in the Shakespearian associations of Stratford-on-Avon rose to an abnormal degree, owing to the proposed demolition by the Town Council of certain cottages in the neighbourhood of the poet's birthplace, in order to provide a site for a Free Library. The public discussion of the value or otherwise of these cottages as Shakespeare relics not unnaturally led to communications in the press on the whole subject of local Shakespearian traditions, one of the most important letters contributed to the discussion being one from Mr. J. Cuming Walters, who

questioned the authenticity of the great majority of the relics, principally on the ground of the absence of evidence. There were, of course, a few orthodox Shakespeare lovers bold enough to challenge the unbelief of the student, but as a result of the controversy Mr. Walters received the following, amongst other admissions, from those who met his attack :

1. Not one piece of furniture in the Henley Street house is known to have been there in Shakespeare's time.

2. Shakespeare's desk from the Grammar School is only classed as his by old tradition, and is almost certainly of later date.

3. Anne Hathaway's cottage has nothing but tradition to support it, and we do not know that Shakespeare was ever in the place. The furniture was not in the cottage in Shakespeare's time.

4. The shovel-board in New Place has no proved connection with Shakespeare.

With Mr. Walter's attitude on this matter I entirely agree, as far as he goes ; but in my view, the student should not be content with a statement founded on an absence of evidence, but should rather place himself in the position of being able, with some assurance, to say, from the evidence which any given relic bears *on the face of it*, whether that relic is pre-Shakespearian, contemporary with Shakespeare, or post-Shakespearian. I could give no better example of the necessity of a proper study of the various periods and their interpretation than the ignorant traditions that

surround some of the furniture in the Shakespeare house.

The daily press frequently contains wildly casual remarks on antiquities, real or spurious, but what the connoisseur has to do is to distinguish between science and tradition. Popular ideas as to rough, strangely-shaped, and crazy furniture are loose in the extreme, for these qualities do not necessarily imply great age. In the course of the recent controversy of which I have been speaking, the case for and against local traditions was thus admirably put by Mr. Sidney Lee:

'It is to be admitted that local traditions often tend to become, without historic justification, articles of faith. On the other hand, the search for truth may be baulked if local traditions are scorned before their credentials are submitted to careful inquiry.'

My own experience supports the latter contention, for I have sometimes found that a local legend in which no credence could be placed has been the means of pointing the way to actual history.

## CHAPTER V

### OAKEN CHAIRS AND STOOLS FROM THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY TO THE RENAISSANCE

IN the chapter on ancient rarities I have already treated of some of the existing specimens of wooden chairs, as well as the so-called Saxon chair at the Leicester Hospital, in Warwick. Chairs of the Norman period do not exist, and those represented in manuscript or missal paintings are such mere abstractions that very little idea of shape or structure can be gathered from them. Coming down to the actual examples of English work that we can date with any knowledge or certainty, we find that, as with chests, the thirteenth century is the earliest period which can have any practical interest for the collector.

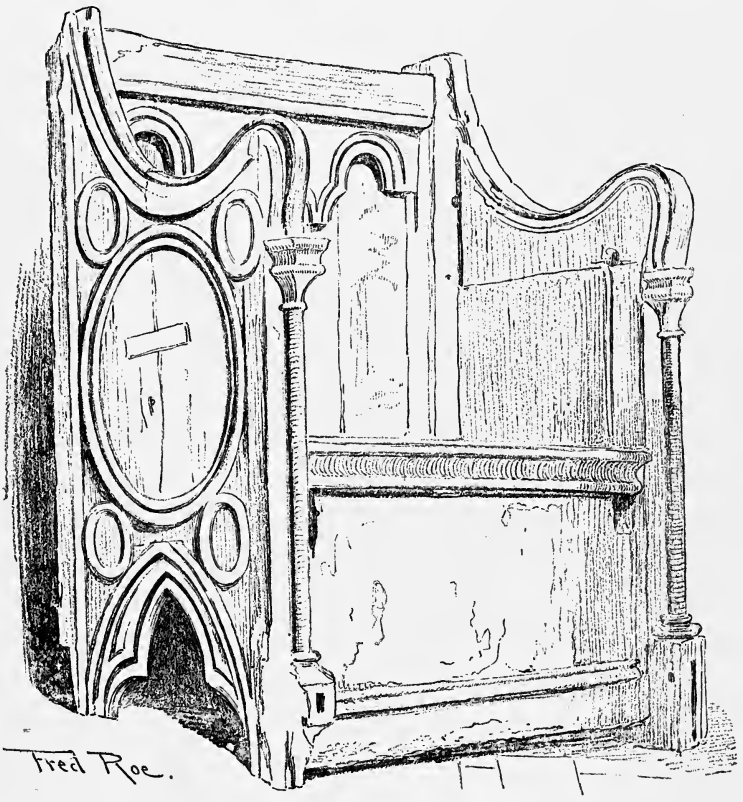
Perhaps the most deeply interesting chair in the kingdom, as well as one of the earliest, is the Coronation State chair, made by the order of Edward I. to contain the famous stone which he brought from Scone, in Scotland. The style of this chair is purely architectural, both form and detail showing it to belong to the end of the Early English period, the authenticity of its historical origin being thereby supported.

To the collector the chair does not appeal strongly, as it is more than probable that it has always been unique in the strict sense of that term, and it therefore exhibits a type of which it is impossible to acquire examples. Another chair of Edward I.'s time, which was actually used by that monarch, remains in the Chapter House of Lincoln Cathedral. This relic, however, has been tampered with, and is not improved by the modern additions of carved lions on its arms as well as a false back.

Several other early Gothic chairs exist in various parts of the country, most of which, though of different dates, would appear from certain signs to have once formed parts of the equipment of churches or other religious establishments. Of these, the chair remaining at Little Dunmow, in Essex, is most likely the earliest, probably dating from about the middle of the thirteenth century. This chair is notable from its association with the ancient custom of the Dunmow Flitch, the history of which is worth recording. Dunmow was formerly the seat of the powerful family of Fitzwalter, one of whom, Robert, or Reginald, during the reign of Henry III., instituted the remarkable custom of giving away a gammon or flitch of bacon to any married couple who would, kneeling upon certain sharp flints in the churchyard, go through a sort of mock trial successfully, and take an oath that they had not, since they were

> 'Married man and wife,
> By household broils, or contentious strife,
> Or otherwise at bed and board,
> Offended each other in word or in deed,'

the space of time necessary to qualify being not less than a year and a day. The Fitzwalter who instituted this remarkable tenure is said to have secured the first flitch himself while disguised as a rustic from the Prior




THIRTEENTH-CENTURY CHAIR IN LITTLE DUNMOW CHURCH, ESSEX, FORMERLY USED IN THE 'CEREMONY OF THE FLITCH'

of the convent of Dunmow. The earliest claim on record was made in the year 1445, during the reign of Edward IV., when it was won by 'Steven Samuel and his wife.' The flitch was not won again till the

twenty-third year of the reign of Henry VI., when a certain Richard Wright, of Bradbourn, in Norfolk, was successful in obtaining it. At the commencement of Henry VIII.'s reign it was again secured. After the dissolution of the monasteries the old custom was still kept up, being, in fact, a part of the manorial tenure, the ceremonies being performed at a court-baron held by the steward of the manor. Only three successful applications subsequent to the Reformation are recorded, the last being that of 'John Shakeshanks, a wool-comber, and Ann his wife, of Wethersfield,' on June 20, 1751. A contemporary painting of this last ceremony was produced by one David Ogbourne, and this, being executed in a truly Hogarthian manner, has given rise to the tradition that Hogarth was present on the occasion. The picture was lately in the possession of a resident of Cavendish Square.

The happy couples who received the flitch were 'chaired' in the particular piece of furniture which now remains in Little Dunmow Church. The chair itself is very massive in its construction, the 'feathering' and surface of the wood showing a most remarkable hardness. It has probably been painted at one time, but is now of a silvery gray colour, apparently not having been polished for several centuries. The back is formed of planks, which are tongued together, and has applied decoration in the shape of an arcade of the most pure Early English style. The pillars which supported the arches are now gone, but the mortices into which they fitted are apparent in the

cross-bar above the seat. The outer right-hand side is decorated with roundels or wheels of simple but chaste design, and on the inner side of the arms there is some indication that a series of lightly-incised arches has at one time existed, but these have been all but obliterated by the wear of centuries. At the base of the chair, on either side, appear mortices, as though it had at one time possessed ornamental feet, and above these mortices are visible the holes through which the poles were passed when it was employed to raise aloft the happy couple. The Essex folk who live in the collection of tumble-down Tudor cottages round about will tell you that this chair has been used for the ritual of the flitch since its inception, and a great many other people who should be wiser hold the same opinion. That this, however, cannot have been the case an examination of the chair will prove. The outer right-hand side of the chair, as I have already said, is carved with wheel-like decorations, but on the left-hand side the surface of the wood is plain, and various mortices are visible, which show that the seat is part of a larger structure, being, in fact, the end unit of a series of stalls. The truth is that the Dunmow chair, used by merry-makers at the ceremony of the flitch, is actually a waif from the conventual establishment, of which the only surviving part is a solitary aisle, now constituting the village church. It is, one is bound to admit, a remarkable coincidence that the chair and the ceremony should have had their origin in the same reign, but the fact that it is only part of some fitted furniture pre-

cludes the possibility of it having been designed for the purpose for which it was used in later years. The custom of trial for the flitch has of late years been revived in a somewhat debased style at Great Dunmow, some three miles distant from the original scene, but it is pleasant to record that the hallowed relic of Dunmow's ancient priory is now no longer used in connection with the carnival. It rests more fittingly in the chancel of the little church, having been restored, after the lapse of some three and a half centuries, to its original sacred purpose.

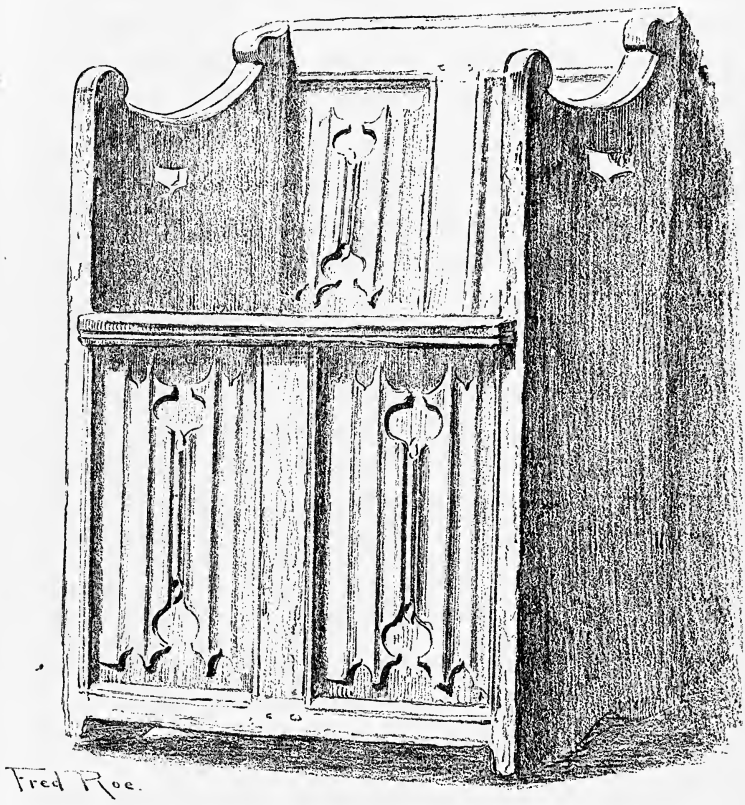
In the Church of Much Hadham, Herts, two ancient chairs exist which are deeply interesting to students of the Gothic styles. They have backs of great height decorated with a cusped arch, and finished at the top with a bold moulding. Their arms have the picturesque slope peculiar to Gothic examples, terminating on either side of the arch with a crocketed pinnacle. These chairs, which are said to have formerly been connected, and used in the rare capacity of movable sedilia, date from the latter half of the fourteenth century.

The amount of destruction that was wrought during the dissolution of the monasteries is incalculable. The chair at St. Mary's Hall, Coventry, a magnificent piece of carved furniture dating from the middle of the fifteenth century, is another instance of the conversion of ecclesiastical possessions to secular purposes by the breaking up of conventual stalls. In this case the wealth of decoration is extraordinary, nearly the whole

surface of the chair being covered with sculptured tracery edged with the conventional vine tendril, and further embellished with heraldic beasts carved in bold relief. The uprights are surmounted by carved figures representing on one side two bears supporting a crown, and on the other an elephant and castle, the latter being the badge of Coventry. The whole piece is in a most beautiful state of preservation. A curious parallel with the Dunmow relic occurs here, for this chair at one time was used in the pageant held in connection with the Lady Godiva celebrations. Brewer introduces an ingenious theory regarding it in his Warwickshire section of the 'Beauties of England and Wales,' published in 1814. He says: 'It has evidently been a double chair, the parts where the other half fitted in being visible. It might perhaps have been made for the reception of Henry VI. and his Queen when they visited the gild,' adding, however, 'or, probably, it was brought from the priory at the dissolution of monasteries, where it might have served as the bishop's throne or the prior's seat.' There is little doubt that the latter theory is the true one.

In the author's own collection is a chair dating from the end of the fifteenth century, built with the simplicity characteristic of work prior to the Renaissance, and possessing gracefully-moulded linen panels. The seat of the chair forms a locker, opened by a door at the back, being doubtless intended to keep books or writing materials in. The piece, which is of immense weight, somewhat resembles in its low, squat outline

the chair of state in St. Mary's Hall, Coventry.* This interesting relic had remained for many years in




LINEN-PANELLED CHAIR, TEMP. HENRY VII., IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR

a neglected state in a barn adjacent to a ruined priory, and was sold with some other effects during the dis-

* From all that we are able to learn concerning chairs of the Gothic or Pointed periods, it is certain that the style most generally adopted in England was the low-backed. The chairs remaining at Lincoln, Dunmow, and Coventry, as well as the Evesham example

tress occasioned by a series of bad years, culminating in the disastrous summer of 1903. It is chairs of this type, but having a tall back surmounted by a canopy, that so rouse our admiration in old MS. illustrations.*

It will be noticed in the two full-page representations of Gothic chairs presented with this chapter that the sloping arms terminate in a rising semicircular formation at their ends. From MS. illustrations of the fourteenth and fifteenth century we learn that these members were sometimes elongated so as to form a rest for writing-boards such as were used by scribes. In Shaw's book on 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture' there is an engraving of a superbly ornamented chair of fourteenth-century workmanship, formerly owned by the Abbots of Evesham, in which the arms terminate with boldly-carved figures, which project sufficiently to serve as supports for a writing-board if desired. When

(which is pictured by Shaw), in addition to the delineations which appear in contemporary MS. illustrations, all go to prove this. High-backed English examples of the Gothic period, such as those at Much Hadham, are exceptions which probably approximate to the province of fitted furniture. This is entirely opposed to Continental art, which mostly produced such lofty articles as those tall, straight-backed chairs to be seen at the Cluny and other French museums, or, to refer to a pictured specimen, that shown in the wonderful painting by Jan van Eyck in our National Gallery, representing Jan Arnolfini and his wife.

* In England the shaped canopies over state chairs now only exist in MS. illustrations, but their actual appearance may be ascertained from the canopy above the font in Pilton Church, Devon. This structure, which dates from the early years of Henry VIII.'s reign, exactly follows the lines of the canopied chair-back, and, as a detail, is probable unique.

these members were not prolonged the writing-board was sometimes held in position by a small iron rod on a pivot connecting the top of the board with the back of the seat. An instance of this feature appears in the illustration of St. Jude writing his epistle, in the MS. Harl., No. 2,897—a work of the late fourteenth century.

Again, I cannot help emphasizing the fact that, whilst in the museums and other collections in France there are very many specimens of furniture of the fifteenth century, or even earlier, in England the number of examples of such age remaining is exceedingly scanty, a circumstance attributable in some measure, perhaps, to the comparatively small production, which in its turn was due to the long state of internecine war. As has been already remarked, the representations of chairs to be seen in medieval documents are frequently so exaggerated that little idea can be obtained of their actual form, and the ignorance of perspective manifested in the earlier pictures no doubt contributes to this appearance of impracticability. But we also find that the extravagance of decoration is such as to have rendered these curious pieces of furniture—if, indeed, they ever existed—practically unusable.

SCRIBE'S CHAIR, FROM LATE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY MS. IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The thrones depicted in the psalter of 'Jean fils du Roi même nomme,' in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, are good specimens of this class of exaggeration —in fact, the early illustrators seem to have possessed no idea of proportion, and were in the habit of overlaying the structure with such a profusion of crockets and pinnacles as must have made the occupant of the seat exceedingly uncomfortable.

The early Gothic chairs which actually remain to us are very beautiful specimens of art, exhibiting none of the exaggerations of the miniaturists. As a good example of the free treatment which the early illustrators were accustomed to employ, mention may be made of the well-known representation of the coronation of a King—either Edward II. or Edward III.—in an English manuscript of the fourteenth century in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The coronation chair here depicted bears but a faint resemblance to the actual object; indeed, the sides of the chair are not proportionately balanced, one arm being entirely omitted; and although the outline of the pointed and crocketed back is fairly correct, the details are evidently filled in from memory, and are most incorrectly rendered. It is a question, to my mind, whether the chair in which Richard II. is represented as sitting in the famous picture in Westminster Abbey is not a fanciful and perhaps mutilated representation of the coronation chair, into the arms of which the artist has introduced singular unmeaning horns.

There is a very excellent representation of a Gothic arm-chair in the MS. of the 'Romance of Alexander' in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, but even here the crockets which terminate the arms are monstrously overdone.

There may possibly be another reason to account for the exceeding scarcity of Gothic chairs in England, inasmuch as for ordinary purposes chests were frequently used as seats. In the Harleian MSS. in the British Museum there is an early fifteenth-century illumination representing David and his choir, in which the King and his attendant musicians are all seated upon chests carved with windows filled with Gothic tracery. An illustration depicting the surrender of Troyes, in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, also shows the King and Queen seated on a long coffer, over which is an improvised canopy.*

I have alluded to the scarcity of furniture in the earlier part of the Middle Ages. So scanty seem to have been the appointments of many households that tables and chairs and even glazed window-casements were carried about by wealthy travellers from place to place for purposes of comfort. This custom no doubt gave rise to the folding or rack-chair, which was prevalent throughout the greater part of Europe during the fifteenth century, and which, as its name implies, was constructed in a manner convenient for carriage from place to place. Several of these remain in Continental museums, and among the delightful sculptures in bas-

* MS., No. 5,054, date, 1484.

relief which decorate the stalls in the choir of the cathedral at Amiens may be seen the representation of a scribe seated upon one of these folding-chairs, and using a linen-panelled chest as a table.

Fortunately, although the number of chairs of the Gothic period remaining is exceedingly scanty, we yet possess some examples of what is still known as the joint-stool. These stools are popularly supposed to have been used solely for the purposes of supporting coffins during the last service for the dead, but I cannot help thinking that this idea is erroneous, for we find joint-stools of all dates in numbers in old country houses. The Charterhouse possesses numerous exceedingly curious specimens. The long, heavy benches such as one sees in the halls at Guildford, Ockwells, Penshurst, and other places, ranged along, beside the great oak tables, were difficult to move, and were supplemented by smaller pieces of furniture of the joint-stool type. I am inclined to the theory, therefore, that, so far from the joint-stool being a strictly ecclesiastical device, its use as a rest for coffins was only a secondary one, and in further support of this argument I may refer to Douce's MS., No. 195, where there is an illumination representing a domestic interior of the fifteenth century. On the hearth beneath the hooded fireplace stand the twisted andirons, and before the fire which burns upon the hearth is a good example of the Gothic joint-stool.

One of the very best stools of this type—perhaps the most beautiful of all, and an English example to

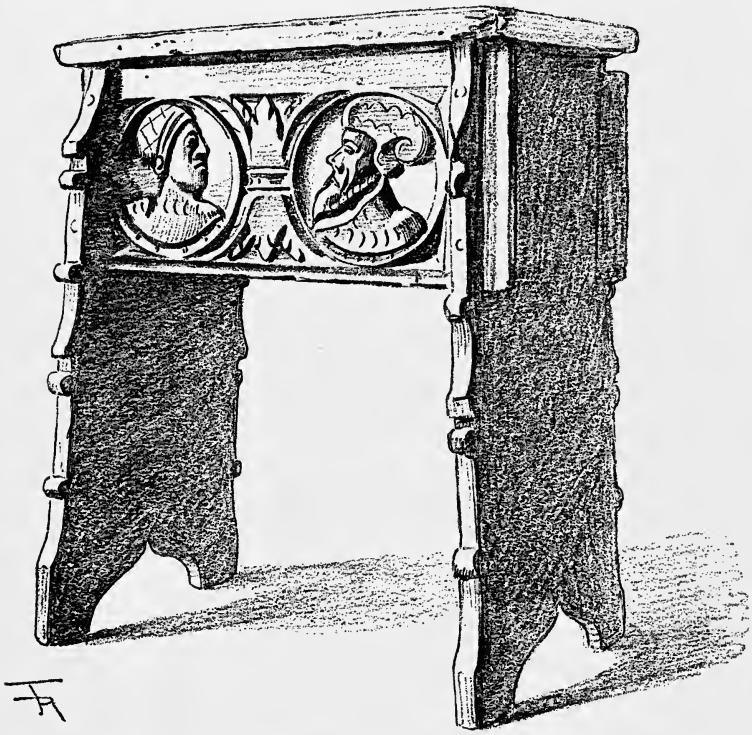
boot—is in the collection of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge. The whole construction of the framework exhibits that simplicity which is one of the admirable characteristics of the fifteenth century, and the surface of the wood on the sides is carved with

Fred Roe.

STOOL, TEMP. HENRY VII., IN THE COLLECTION OF SIR CHARLES LAWES-WITTEWRONGE, BART

a delicate pattern of late Gothic tracery and the conventional bunches of grapes and vine tendrils common to the period. A stool of similar construction, but without the surface carving, may be seen in the Saffron Walden Museum, and another, still more art-

fully keyed together, but with shorter buttresses, is in my own collection. All of these stools are in a very fine state of preservation. These stools, no less than much larger pieces of furniture, illustrate the need of a



STOOL CARVED WITH PORTRAIT MEDALLIONS IN THE COLLECTION OF MORGAN S. WILLIAMS, ESQ., TEMP. HENRY VIII

knowledge of architecture for those who wish to assign dates to them. It has been mooted by some people that, from the shape of the arch which appears upon the sides and ends, these stools have an Eastern origin, but a reference to the barge boards on many houses of

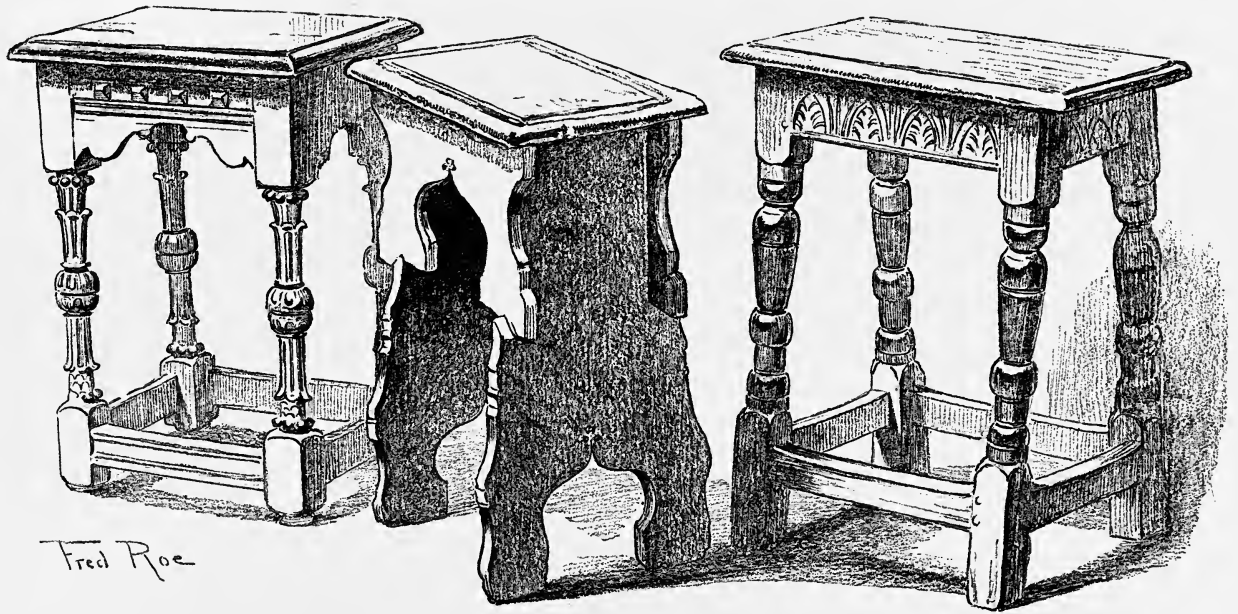
the fifteenth century in England will show that this idea is hastily formed and fallacious, and that this type of arch was a common form of decoration. Houses exhibiting this semi-moresque arch in the angle formed by the junction of the barge boards may be seen at Wingham and Tunbridge, in Kent. The Boar's Head Inn at Bishop's Stortford exhibits the same feature on its barge boards. This hostel is actually a building of the fifteenth century, and its very name is significant, the Boar's Head being the badge of the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard III. The wonderful embattled beam which spans the ingle-nook in the bar-parlour fixes the date of the house as not later than the second half of the fifteenth century.

Mr. Morgan Williams, of St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire, possesses a very characteristic joint-stool of Henry VIII.'s time, with buttresses running up the sides, in which the same construction is used as in the earlier examples. This stool, however, is carved with heads in medallions—a type of decoration which, as is well known, did not come into vogue till after the French conquests in Italy, when the classic revival commenced.

A joint-stool of Normandy work and of a most beautiful type of Gothic art may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum (No. 968-1897). This is a fairly recent importation, and is undoubtedly genuine, but it is interesting to note that since its exhibition Paris and other cities in France have abounded in spurious imitations of this treasure, all

more or less charged with a difference, purporting to be genuine. The stool at South Kensington has its uprights pierced with wheels of the most exquisite flamboyant tracery, and a connecting bar, likewise carved, is keyed through the uprights with a wedge in the simple early fashion. The seat is likewise perforated in such a way as to form a handle for convenience in carrying.

The plate opposite this page shows three joint-stools of different types. The ordinary observer, on looking at these specimens of ancient joint-stools, would in nine cases out of ten be disposed to prefer that on the right, because, being of familiar type, it is more within the scope of his comprehension, and also because it is decorated with carving on the top rail. This stool, however, is a Jacobean type, which is not difficult to obtain. The two stools to the left, on the other hand, are of very much rarer type, and really require the eye of the expert to appreciate. The centre stool belongs to the latter end of the fifteenth century, and exhibits in its construction all the simplicity of the early craftsmen, while that on the left belongs probably to the latter end of Henry VIII.'s reign, and is a type of extreme rarity. This stool requires minute examination before its real beauty can be properly estimated. The scalework on its legs shows traces of the dying Gothic influence, while the knops and the delicate jewelwork round the legs herald the approaching melon-bulb of the Elizabethan era.




THREE JOINT-STOOLS

1, Middle of the sixteenth century 2, end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century
3, middle of the seventeenth century

Some exceptionally interesting stools remain in use in what is now the library of the Charterhouse. We cannot follow here the vicissitudes of the Charterhouse, from its foundation as a monastery by Sir Walter Manny, through the history of its degradation by Henry VIII. and subsequent troubles, until the benevolent merchant Thomas Sutton fixed upon the site for his hospital. Part of the walls of the existing building are known to be fragments of the old priory, and a tradition exists that the apartment in which the stools remain was the former refectory of the lay-brothers of the monastery. In later times this room was used as a dining-hall for the foundation scholars of the school, now removed to Godalming. The scholars sat upon long forms placed on either side of the old tables, and at the top of each table sat the senior boy on a stool of similar character to the forms. The construction of these stools is exceptionally massive, but they possess no mouldings or ornament whatever. It is difficult to speak with any certainty, but I cannot help thinking that the origin of these stools dates from early Tudor times. In all probability they are part of the ancient furniture of the priory, made shortly before the Reformation, and have outlived the dramatic changes through which the place has passed. There is absolutely nothing in their make and shape to suggest that they are coeval with the elaborate classic additions and embellishments which were made by the Duke of Norfolk in 1571, or by Thomas Sutton in James I.'s time. The simple Gothic style of con-

struction is adhered to, though from their lines they are probably later than the other stools in this category which we have mentioned. Such forms and stools were the usual accompaniment of the dining-hall in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and in a great measure took the place of chairs, which were only used by those of the highest rank upon the daïs.

Passing from monkish times to the declining days of Gothic influence in the reign of Henry VIII., we still find the number of existing chairs belonging to that transitional period to be very small. There is some wonderful carved panelling of Gothic character in Abington Abbey, near Northampton, to which we shall have occasion to refer more fully in a subsequent chapter, and among the subjects which are carved on the frieze, one panel claims special attention. On the left a rustic in a smock-frock gazes at the stars, while in the right-hand compartment a bearded alchemist sits before his fire, stirring the contents of a cauldron which hangs from the hake. The old man is seated upon an arm-chair of Gothic shape and with linen-panelled side, resembling in appearance the well-known examples to be seen in the Cluny and other French museums. This record in wood is exceedingly interesting, for the panelling, as I have said, is distinctly Gothic in character, and one would feel inclined to date it as belonging to the reign of Henry VII. Considerations of costume, however—the importance of a study of which we have already insisted upon—

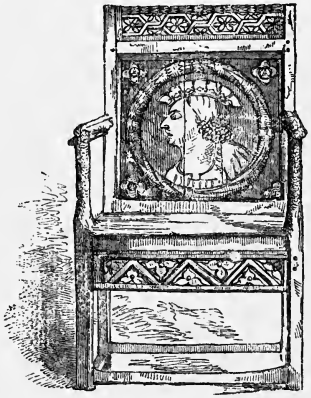
prove, from certain unfailing indications on some of the panels that the carvings cannot have been executed till the reign of Henry VIII. This combination

AN ALCHEMIST.

From a carved panel at Abington Abbey, Northampton, showing linen-panelled chair of the commencement of the sixteenth century.

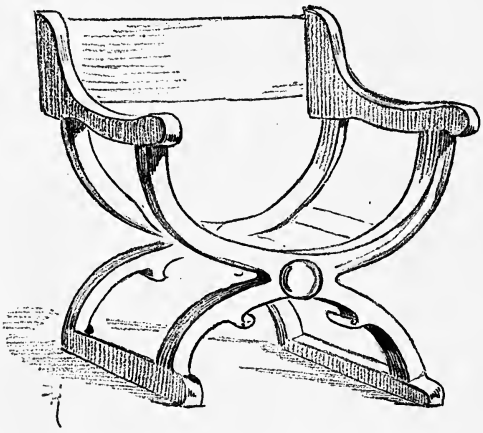
affords us a true insight into the fact that, while dress and customs were undergoing radical changes, furniture was still being made in the old style—at least, in some places.

The fashion of enclosing portrait heads in medallions, as is well known, was introduced after the French conquests in Italy, and speedily became a popular method of decoration. Yet, although we find cabinets and chests bearing this classic style of ornament, it is seldom to be observed on English chairs. A chair of this period, exhibiting a woman's head in a roundel, formerly stood in the chancel of Hunston Church, Suffolk, but it has now disappeared. In Shaw's 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture'—one of the most delightful works of its kind that has ever been produced — is a beautiful plate of an armchair of Henry VIII.'s time, exhibiting heads enclosed in medallions, as well as characteristic arabesques of the period. It is described as being in the possession of 'John Abel, Esqre., Surgeon, of Mitchel-Dean, Gloucestershire,' but otherwise no particulars are given. A very fine specimen of a chair of Henry VIII.'s time, bearing the medallion decoration, was formerly owned by the late Mr. C. B. Birch, A.R.A. This chair was picked up at some country cottage in Shropshire by Mr. Birch's father in the early part of the nineteenth century, and remained in the possession of the family till Mr. Birch's death in 1893, when it



CHAIR, TEMP. HENRY VIII
From a woodcut by the late C. B. Birch, A.R.A.

passed into the hands of Sir Henry Meux. A tradition was attached to the chair that the portrait on the back was that of Richard III., but this could scarcely be possible, for the medallion decoration, together with the classic, leaf-like band on the cornice, belongs to a style which at the earliest did not come over to England till the reign of the succeeding monarch. The chair, of which we give a reproduction in a hitherto unpublished woodcut, from a drawing by the late Mr. Birch, probably belongs to the reign of Henry VIII.



VENETIAN CHAIR, DATE ABOUT 1500
Victoria and Albert Museum

## CHAPTER VI

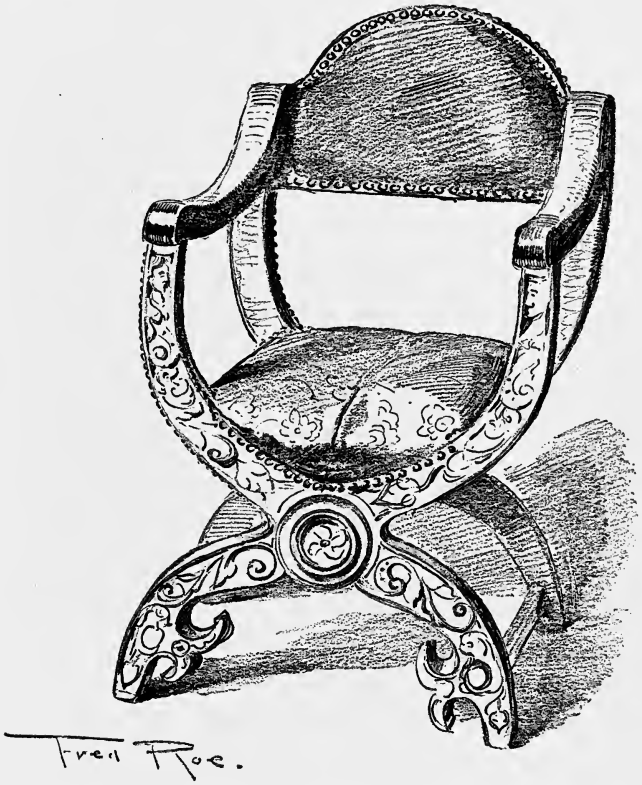
### OAKEN CHAIRS AND STOOLS FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

IN the last chapter I attempted to give an account of the different styles of chairs and stools down to the time of the Renaissance. From the absence of surviving examples the catalogue was necessarily a brief one. The reign of the first two successors to the throne after the death of Henry VIII. was so short that the interval can scarcely be termed a period, and few indeed are the articles which we can identify as actually belonging to the time. A panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which probably once formed part of a chair-back, however, affords us some information as to the commingling of the Gothic and classic styles which was taking place in the production of carved furniture. A profile portrait of the boy King, with which this panel is decorated, is surmounted by a semicircular arch of the new style, embellished with unmistakably Gothic spandrels. About the middle of the sixteenth century the Italian form of chair seems to have become popular in England, the seat and arms being formed by semicircular pieces of wood

resting on similar pieces inverted. These chairs had no wooden back, the space between the uprights being filled with velvet or other material, stretched across. The whole structure was usually covered with silk or velvet, probably decorated in appliqué, and a thick cushion of the same material was placed upon the seat. The chair in the vestry of York Minster, which has more than once been wrongly attributed to the time of Richard II., is a good specimen of this type, although decay has wrought sad havoc with it.* The picture of Mary Tudor by Sir Antonio More also depicts the Queen seated upon a chair of this description. One of the finest of these circular-framed chairs yet remaining is in the possession of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, Bart., whose fine collection of antiquities at Rothamsted Park is referred to several times during the course of this work. The wood it is built of is chestnut, the front of the arms and legs being elaborately carved with arabesque patterns and masks. The material originally stretched across the back and seat has disappeared, being replaced by stuffed leather, the period of the alteration being indicated by the form of the back, which rises into the

* This type, which is probably Venetian in origin, must have been known generally on the Continent long before we had it in England. In the picture of Anne of Burgundy worshipping the Virgin and Child, in the Bedford Missal, a chair constructed in this manner is depicted most accurately. The Bedford Missal, now in our British Museum, was written and illustrated expressly for the Duke of Bedford about 1430. This form of seat is popularly known nowadays by the appellation of the 'X chair.'

half-round shape associated with the junction of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Another chair of this form, additionally interesting from its being connected with the fortunes of the House of Stuart, is




CHAIR, TEMP. HENRY VIII., IN THE COLLECTION OF SIR CHARLES LAWES-WITTEWRONGE, BART

preserved at the Cottage Hospital, Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Gloucestershire. This relic is confidently believed to be the actual one which was used by the unhappy Charles I. during his trial at Westminster

Hall. The chair in question possesses a padded back, terminating in two oval-shaped pinnacles, which, as well as the whole framework of the structure, are covered with velvet, formerly of a crimson hue. During the Stuart Exhibition, held at the New Gallery in 1889, this memento of Charles's trial was an object of special interest. Some chairs of an almost precisely similar type and date exist at Ham House.

Elizabethan and Jacobean chairs, good, bad, and indifferent, may be found in numbers. Oak arm-chairs of this period frequently exhibit the round arch upon the panel in their backs, though the spandrels often show traces of the debased Gothic which yet lingered in parts of the country. Amongst the carvings which decorated the back panel may often be found a singular flower resembling the sunflower, the origin of which it is not easy to determine. Whatever its significance may have been, it is now lost and forgotten. What is technically termed the 'strap and jewel' moulding also made its appearance, while the single or double *guilloche* was also used. The backs of chairs were often inlaid with holly or other light wood representing geometrical patterns or bunches of conventional flowers, these inlaid designs being applied to the back panel, generally beneath a semicircular arch supported by classic pilasters. The round arch is a common form of decoration upon chairs of late sixteenth and seventeenth century work. In the finer examples, as with chests, the arch, pillar caps, etc., are applied,

being actually built up in separate pieces upon the surface of the back panel, but in rougher specimens the arches are merely incised, exhibiting a return to more ancient and cruder methods. Geometrical inlay was also carried round the skirting of the seat, and sometimes may even be found on the foot-rails. The actual form of oak arm-chairs varied but little from the commencement of Elizabeth's reign down to the close of the seventeenth century, and vast numbers of such articles are recklessly assigned to Elizabethan times which do not actually date farther back than the time of Charles II. and William III.

CARVED ARMS ON THE MAYOR'S CHAIR, SANDWICH

Fine specimens of inlaid Elizabethan chairs command very high prices nowadays, but the best examples differ vastly from those of poorer quality, both in respect of workmanship and intrinsic value. Fine Elizabethan and Jacobean arm-chairs may often be seen in the chancels and vestries of our country churches, St. Alban's Abbey Church possessing several magnificent specimens. The characteristics of English chairs and

stools of the later Renaissance are intensely national, and have little in common with the Continental productions of the period. It would be hardly possible for anyone at all conversant with the subject of old oak to mistake a chair or stool of this period and of Continental manufacture for an English piece, or *vice versâ*.

The use of the linen panel in connection with chairs seems to have ended with the reign of Henry VIII., for though we find this form of decoration occasionally, though rarely, continued in wainscotting and chests of Elizabeth's time, there appears to be no instance of its having been employed in the ornamentation of chairs. The sides of arm-chairs of the Gothic period down to the reign of Henry VIII. were almost invariably filled in with long linen panels extending from the arms to the floor. The eccentricities of Elizabethan dress, such as the farthingale and the puffed trunk hose, however, necessitated the abandonment of these side-panels, and the space beneath the arms was thenceforward left open. It is not generally realized that the shape of chairs has been influenced at various times by contemporary fashion in dress. This may be traced through the narrow-hipped Gothic types to be seen in the Cluny and other museums; the wide Elizabethan chairs, with often round arms to accommodate the full trunk hose, and the wide seats of the Early Georgian chairs, which were especially adapted for full-skirted coats, dwindling down to narrow seats as the 'dickey-bird' and swallow-tail fashion came in.

Oak arm-chairs of a very late period may sometimes be found with the sides filled in somewhat after the old manner, but these are in nearly every case rough country productions, such as were used in farmhouses and other habitations of the humble class, and belong to the decadence of oak furniture when its finer features had departed.

It is to the deplorable state of uncleanliness of the rush-strewn floors of our forefathers that we are indebted for the cross-rails which form a foot-rest on, not only our early tables, but also our chairs. Rails were, in chairs of the Elizabethan period, extended round the framework at an equal height of some couple of inches or so from the floor. As rush-strewn floors and their attendant discomforts gave place to a more cleanly order of things, so the actual foot-rail in front of the chair became rather a nuisance than a necessity. It is probably due to this fact that chairs of the second half of the seventeenth century, while still retaining the skeleton framework of rails, exhibit that in the front raised a considerable distance from the ground. By this arrangement the rail loses the character of a rest for the feet, which are then free to be drawn beneath the chair if desired. In this new position the front rail naturally lends itself to decoration, and is generally turned, or ornamented with carving. I may emphasize this by saying that if the front rail on an old oak chair is raised above the others, and, furthermore, is decorated with turning or carving, the chair to which it belongs can safely be assigned,

to a rather late period in the history of oak—that is to say, probably not earlier than the middle of the seventeenth century. I am not sure but that the elevation of the front rail may not be associated with the increase of cleanliness which came about under the Puritan régime.

Makers' marks on furniture of the Gothic period, as I have already stated, are excessively rare. These were almost invariably incised, but in the later period of which we are now treating chairs and stools may be frequently found with the makers' initials branded or burnt in with a hot-iron.

Mention has been made in Chapter IV. of the increasing difficulty of identifying local differences in English furniture of the seventeenth century, owing to modern facilities for its removal from one county to another, and the consequent intermixture of examples which takes place. Evidences of local individuality in furniture may, however, occasionally be found in such old institutions as some of our provincial almshouses or hospitals, the equipment of which was undoubtedly carried out by craftsmen residing in the vicinity. In these places the furniture has often been preserved with scrupulous care, affording valuable testimony to the style of art peculiar to the neighbourhood at the time of its manufacture. The great height of the backs of certain oak chairs which had their origin in the Northern Counties is well known, and to these is often attached the rather general appellation of the 'Yorkshire type.' Some exaggerated examples of

this style may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, placed in the panelled room reaved from Sizergh Castle.* These chairs have two panels in their backs, the lower one recessed and ornamented with some very ordinary seventeenth-century carving, the upper panel being flush with the framing and sculptured with the arms of Thomas Wentworth, first Earl of Strafford, who was executed in 1641. The backs of these chairs from the seat to the summit measure some inches in height, the whole structure totalling the extraordinary height of 55 inches.

Painful as such disclosures must necessarily be regarding venerated objects in our important national collection, I am convinced, after carefully examining the chairs in question, that, though mainly genuine, they have nevertheless been tampered with, and that the flush panels exhibiting the Strafford arms are additions, placed in their present position at a later date. In order to confirm this statement, it may be mentioned that the stiles above the lower panel have been spliced, thus increasing the height of the back, in order to allow for the insertion of the extra panel. The said stiles have then been faced with a thin strip of carved oak to conceal the join, the whole structure being capped with the original stretcher. The facing of uprights in this manner was never carried out by the old craftsmen, and its detection on an antique is one of the strongest proofs that the piece has been tampered with. As slight additional evidence, it may

* No. 407, 1890.

be noted that the carving on the shield panels is of an entirely different character from that on the rest of the chair, while that on the thin added strips of veneer is evidently modern. An examination of the splice, which may be detected on each of these chairs, shows that previous to the addition the backs were unusually high. The addition must therefore have been planned by someone whose knowledge of stiles was scarcely on a par with his desire for effect.

It is certain that the high-backed type at this stage was quite foreign to the Eastern Counties, where we even have evidence that in the early years of the seventeenth century chairs assumed a somewhat squat or stunted appearance, very unlike their Northern contemporaries. Some exceedingly interesting and striking specimens of local work of this period may be seen in the old Trinity Bede Houses at Castle Rising, in Norfolk, where the ancient furniture has remained almost intact and in use since the time of the foundation of that institution. The Bede Houses were erected by the charity of Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, in 1609-1615, for the benefit of twelve poor women, but, owing to the death of the Earl a year before the completion of the building, the grant of £100 for their support was made by Thomas, Earl of Arundel, cousin and next heir of the deceased. The very costume of the aged beneficiaries has remained unchanged since the foundation of the hospital, and consists of a tall steeple-crowned hat covering a white cap, and a large scarlet cloak, embroidered on the left side with the badge of the Howards.

AT CASTLE RISING, NORFOLK

In the picturesque dining-hall which is attached to the hospital are some excellent specimens of carved oak, which evidently formed part of the domestic articles with which the place was originally furnished on its completion. Particularly noticeable amongst these are the chairs referred to—low, quaint pieces, with an arch incised on their back panels, which arch, however, possesses neither plinth nor capital, but is decorated simply with a running scroll resembling a sort of involved *guilloche* passing over it from one side to the other. These chairs are likewise very low in the seat, the latter being supported by squat but well-proportioned legs.

This interesting suite may be accepted as a fair type of what was produced in Norfolk about the year 1615. Each of the twelve residents possesses a similar chair, though in one instance its authenticity may be more than doubted. A close comparison between the chair specified and any one of its brethren cannot fail to be instructive, for it will speedily be discovered that the spurious specimen possesses evidence of its comparatively modern origin in the exaggerated depth of its decorative carving (nearly always a bad sign), in the sharpness and want of wear on its cutting, in the inferior imitative outline of its turned legs, and, lastly, in the absence of the appearance of age, which is produced by centuries of use. Whether some accident has deprived the set of one of its pieces, necessitating replacement, or whether the original chair has been pirated stealthily into the collection of some unscrupu-

lous dilettante, it is now impossible to say. The pseudo-antique just mentioned shows signs of considerable effort in the cultivation of surface, but it is probably not more than fifty years old. I shall have occasion to treat further of some of the other pieces of furniture in this old-world refuge. As at Abbot's Hospital, Guildford, the Leicester Hospital, Warwick, and many similar spots, one can linger at Castle Rising for a short time enjoying picturesque and living memories of a past age.

Another chair of the slighter class of build associated with the period of the early Stuarts is that in which the back, instead of being panelled, is formed of two or three open arches fitted with small turned, acorn-shaped knobs or pendants. I cannot assign these chairs to any particular district or county, but the probability is that the greater number come from the Northern Midlands, whence they are mostly to be traced, though specimens actually come from their original homes as far west as Devonshire. Two very good examples of this class are now in the cemetery chapel at Brighton.*

Chairs of the time of Charles I. can scarcely be said to be very rare, though a good many often assigned to that monarch's reign actually belong to a slightly later date. In Lubenham Church, Northamptonshire, is an arm-chair with a fluted panel back, which is said to have been used by Charles I. before the historic conflict at Naseby. The legend may prob-

* See illustration on title-page.

ably be true; at all events, the chair represents a typical example of the early Stuart period, but other chairs to which this temporary royal occupation is attributed were without doubt made long after Charles I.'s time. An instance of this is furnished at the Great House, Cheshunt. This dilapidated fragment of what was once a princely mansion contains a number of interesting and instructive relics, and is well worthy a visit by the connoisseur. It may in a way be associated with Charles himself, who as a child is said to have stayed at Theobald's, close by. Some parts of the house date from the early part of the fifteenth century, but in a dreary upper apartment termed 'the haunted room' (which, however, is of a date subsequent to Charles's time) may be seen an extremely curious child's toy—a rocking-horse and a high leather-backed chair, with flanged cheek-pieces, to which local tradition has long assigned the dignity of having been used by Charles I. The rocking-horse is a deeply interesting object to the historical student, and I am strongly inclined to think that in this case oral tradition is true, and that the toy may have come from the now-vanished palace of Theobald's, and have been actually used by the ill-fated baby Prince.

The chair referred to, however, though peculiar in its shape and dimensions, could hardly be older than the time of William III., and might easily be later. The height of the back is so astonishing, and the curves of the flanges and arms are so uncommon, that it is rather difficult to date it accurately; but this chair

is perhaps the precursor of the 'grandfather' chair, with cheek rests and cabriole legs, which we associate with the days of Queen Anne. The history attached to the rocking-horse may probably have been foisted on to the chair in order to increase public interest, or may be a modern imagining due to the ignorance of styles.

A child's chair having every probability of being connected with the royal House of Stuart was sold a year or so ago by Messrs. Christie, Manson, and Woods. This beautiful specimen, which was traced back to an old hall near Framlingham, in Suffolk, was of early seventeenth-century design, with nothing particularly uncommon in its shape or carved decoration. Its chief interest, however, lay in the fact that on the summit of the uprights of the back was incised the device of a rose surmounted by a crown, these hair-line incisions being inlaid with silver, after the manner in which we so frequently find pistol-butts decorated during the seventeenth century. Holes for a foot-rest were visible on the front legs. There is every probability that this chair, whose early history is unknown, was used by either Prince Henry or Prince Charles, sons of Charles I.

Mr. George Kilburne, R.I., of Hampstead, whose remarkable family chest we have occasion to deal with in another part of this work, possesses a fine child's high chair of this period—perhaps slightly earlier—which has a back panel sculptured with the conventional rose. This chair, like the chest, is also a family relic of the Kilburnes of Hawkhurst.

In the Lady Chapel at St. Alban's Abbey are two wonderfully fine specimens of seventeenth-century arm-

CHILD'S CHAIR, INLAID WITH THE ROYAL ROSE AND CROWN IN SILVER, FIRST HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

chairs. One of them bears on its back panel a carved rose enclosed in a lozenge, while the other, of later character, and probably dating from Charles I.'s reign,

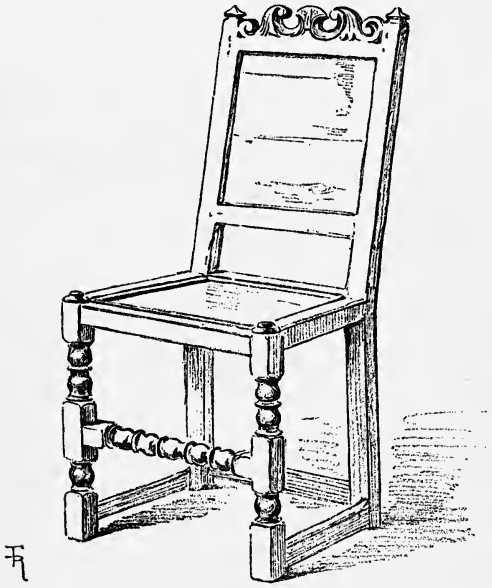
is of a bold architectural outline, having a mitred panel in its back. The seats in each case are supported by pillar legs.

Another class of seventeenth-century chair which, like the excessively tall-backed specimens mentioned some few pages back, is also popularly known by the appellation of the 'Yorkshire type,' is that which has transverse bars in the back, moulded severally into arches, profusely carved, and fitted with small pendants. The approximate date of production of these examples may be ascertained from the appearance of a mask roughly resembling the features of Charles I., which is included in the ornamental carving. This detail fixes such pieces as bear it as being of a time not long subsequent to the death of the martyred monarch, when the custom of perpetuating his memory both in the decoration of their furniture and the hilts of their 'mortuary swords' was inaugurated by loyal families. When the mask is not clearly represented, a vague resemblance formed out of ornamental scrolls may nevertheless sometimes be detected in the carved decoration.

The Commonwealth period was too short for any radical change to have taken place in the design of furniture. In brief, it may be said that the details during this period commenced to show an artistic decline. The most ordinary form of chair in use for domestic purposes possessed a low, stuffed, and padded back, the material being leather, brocade, or other material, which was also stretched across the frame to

form the seat, and was fastened with brass or gilt-headed nails.

There is a good specimen of the Carolean low-backed type of chair in the Victoria and Albert Museum, upholstered with contemporary woolwork, which bears upon its back amongst the floral decoration the initials G. S. C. and the date 1649. This chair has the twisted spiral on its rail and legs—an early instance of the introduction of this feature into English furniture, though its Italian prototype was in vogue on the Continent some time previous to the date mentioned.



CHAIR WITH PANELLED BACK AND RECESSED SEAT FOR CUSHIONS, MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

The engraved frontispiece to 'Nature's Pictures'—a work by Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, published in 1656—represents a convivial party at the Duke's house, the whole company being seated on chairs of this description.

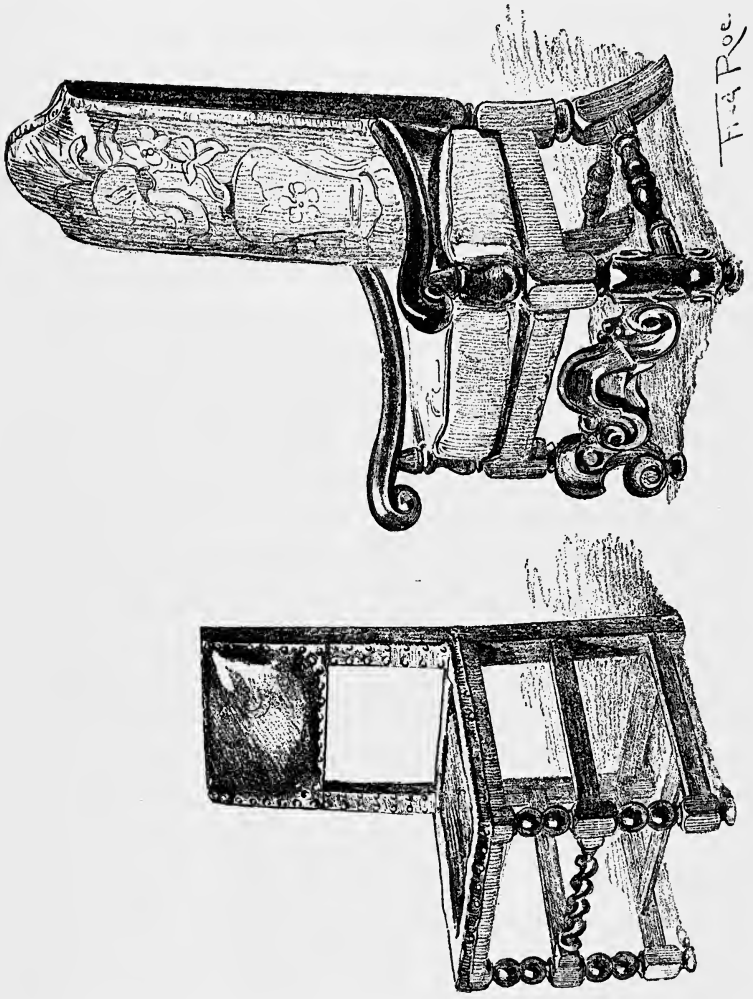
Dutch and English pictures and engravings of this period are so numerous, and represent objects with

such scrupulous accuracy, that we are at no loss to determine the dates of articles of a similar nature with considerable exactitude. This low-backed and leather-seated type of chair was so intimately associated with the Cromwellian period that the designation of 'Cromwell chairs' was actually attached to numerous reproductions of the style made to suit the taste of some fifty years ago, and not always distinguishable by the novice from the original article.

In the Northern Counties of England chairs of a hybrid pattern were made at a time shortly subsequent to the Commonwealth, which were a sort of cross between the massive carved chair of the Carolean period and the newer style with twisted rails and splats in the back. There is no doubt that the makers, being far away from the influence of Metropolitan fashion, while possessing some inkling of the later style, were unable wholly to detach themselves from the more weighty and massive attributes of the furniture of the first half of the century.

Lighter oak chairs of a time subsequent to the Commonwealth may be met with in numbers in our old English mansions. Knole House, Sevenoaks, in Kent, possesses galleries full of these, as well as other earlier examples. Hatfield House, Hardwick Hall, and Penshurst (the ancestral home of the Sidneys), also contain characteristic examples of the period. Many of these are stuffed on the seats, backs, and arms, but the types which are most popularly and accurately attributed to the Commonwealth and the

reign of Charles II. are, firstly, the short, leather-backed and leather-seated chairs, decorated with brass



TWO CHAIRS, SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
1 Leather-backed and seated chair, used at the 'Bloody Assize,' Taunton
2 Arm-chair with stuffed back and cushion, temp. Charles II or William III

studs, and having twisted rails; and, secondly, the taller cane-backed and cane-seated productions, which are so often surmounted by the regal crown supported

by cupids. Specimens of the former type are numerous, and may be frequently met with in country districts; Warwickshire, to particularize, was for many years the happy hunting-ground for collectors of this special type. A complete, uniform, and untouched set of such chairs was recently sold for a fabulous price by one of the London dealers. Instances of the latter type may be seen in the chancel of St. Peter's Church, Derby; the Lady Chapel, Waltham Abbey; and many other places of worship. One in particular—a most characteristic arm-chair—stands in the chancel of Cobham Church, Surrey. Unfortunately this is not entirely intact, having had a carved splat fitted into its back during the so-called Abbotsford period in place of the old cane, which has disappeared, though the holes through which the latter was laced remain in evidence.

While examining this chair, I was gratuitously informed by an ancient attendant that it was given to the church over 400 years ago — 'But there's no knowin' how old the chair is; nobody can tell that.' I verily believe that custodians increase the sum total of years of local objects every time they relate their little tale. A refutation of this romance, however, was incised upon the reverse of the back, whereby it appears that the chair was presented to the church by one of the churchwardens in 1837, when the incongruous splat was doubtless added.

An entire suite of Charles II. chairs of fine quality is distributed throughout the Minstrels' Gallery and

the Great Stairway at that wonderful old mansion, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire. Other excellent examples exist amongst the furniture in the Long Gallery at Hatfield House, Herts, and some equally good diversified specimens are at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk. The construction of these cane-furnished chairs is very faulty, and the leverage on the back so great that they cannot be trusted with safety for the purposes of repose. The frequent appearance of the crown upon their backs and stretchers no doubt marks the spirit of the times, when both craftsman and purchaser were glad to show their appreciation of royalty restored. Some very singular evidence as to the precise date of certain of these chairs may be obtained by testing the accuracy of a very popular legend concerning the state furniture in Holyrood Palace. There are a good many chairs and settees of late seventeenth-century pattern at Holyrood, which, with other pieces, have been for generations shown and described as belonging to Mary Stuart's time. One piece especially, a tall-backed chair with an oviform fitting of cane, and bearing on its summit, as well as on its stretcher, the royal crown flanked with conventional thistles, is actually dubbed with the title of 'Queen Mary's Chair,' while to another piece of furniture, a couch or settee, surmounted with carved cherubs and bearing also on its upholstery the royal crown, a yet more circumstantial fable is attached. The latter relic is said to have been made expressly for the nuptials of Mary Stuart and the weak-minded Darnley in 1565.

Tradition is hard to set aside, perhaps as much so in Scotland as anywhere, but in this case tradition happens to be peculiarly vulnerable. It is well known to students of history that when James, Duke of York, and Mary of Modena visited Edinburgh in 1679 they found residence extremely inconvenient at the palace of Holyrood, owing to the empty and dilapidated state in which it had remained since Cromwell's visitation, when his Ironsides, who had used the palace as their common barracks, had, with their usual destructive zeal, looted and broken up, or otherwise destroyed, every particle of furniture in the place, and for thirty years the building had stood an uncared-for and semi-ruinous shell.

The Duke of York and his consort did not make any very prolonged stay on the occasion of their first visit to Holyrood, but they returned in the autumn of the following year, when the palace had been made habitable and furnished, and for some months James and Mary held their Court here with great magnificence. Accounts are still in existence in respect of this renovation, and point indisputably to the fact that the Holyrood furniture belongs approximately to the date of Charles II.'s reign. The pleasure-seeking public cares little whether such articles were made for Mary Stuart in the sixteenth century, or Mary of Modena at the end of the seventeenth. The former personage stands out a picturesque figure in national history, and is, moreover, associated intimately with the traditions of the palace itself; while of Mary of Modena

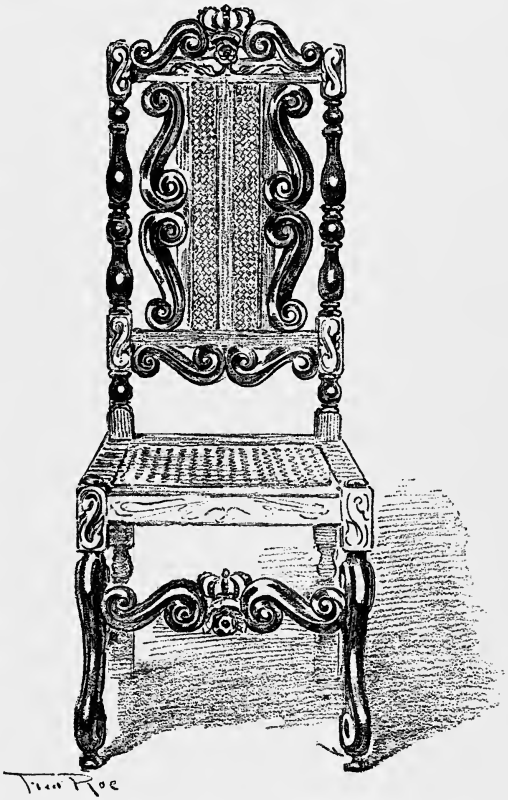
they know but little, and care less, and her short reign of three years contains perhaps as few striking personal events as her exile of thirty. And so details, specious and pleasant, but essentially false and misleading, are allowed to mislead the popular judgment. Who can say but what loose fables such as the Mary Stuart legend may be responsible for a goodly proportion of the numerous anachronisms which have been perpetrated during the early and mid-Victorian era, both in historical painting and book illustration ?*

Some of the finest chairs of this description are in the possession of Mr. Ernest Crofts, R.A., whose ancestral cupboards and chests will be treated in their proper place. Of the chairs in question, which are

* Since writing this chapter the author has discovered the following allusion to the subject in Strickland's account of Mary of Modena: 'The crimson damask state bed, which was preserved from the conflagration at Leslie house, is very similar to the bed now shown at Holyrood as that of Mary Stuart; and certainly, both are a hundred years too modern for beds of the sixteenth century. If the Duchess of York occupied the crimson bed at Holyrood, it would, of course, be styled "Queen Mary's bed" after her consort succeeded to the regal office; and, retaining her name after she had been forgotten by the vulgar, has probably been thus added to the numerous goods and chattels with which tradition has fondly endowed Mary of Scotland.'—'Lives of the Queens of England.'

It should be mentioned that the panelling of the apartment in which Rizzio was murdered, as well as its window casements, are all replacements of the date of James and Mary's occupation, while even its ceiling is ornamented with the cipher C.R. It is difficult to understand how Sir Walter Scott, in his 'Tales of a Grandfather,' could so have overlooked these facts as to state that 'the cabinet and bedroom still remain in the same condition in which they were at the time'—*i.e.*, of Rizzio's murder.

not quite uniform, the most elaborate is carved not only with the crown, but with the royal arms; while amongst the scrollwork in the back appear two cupids bearing shields whereon are the letters I.R., the cipher of James II. Furthermore, each of the back uprights, instead of being surmounted with the usual acorn-shaped ornament, is terminated with a diminutive head wearing a jockey-shaped cap such as we now associate with the uniforms of the Royal Horse Guards bandsmen. This chair can undoubtedly be assigned to a time between the years 1685-1689—a rare instance of internal evidence enabling an undated specimen to be dated with such close accuracy. This magnificent piece, together with other articles of antique



CANE-BACKED CHAIR CARVED WITH ROYAL CROWN, ONE OF A SET IN THE POSSESSION OF SIR CHARLES LAWES-WITTEWRONGE, BART

oak in Mr. Crofts' possession, is all the more interesting in that the Crofts of Suffolk, from whom the present noted historical painter is descended, were, in the seventeenth century, intimately connected with the House of Stuart.*

The furniture formed part of a vast quantity which is believed to have come originally from West Stow and Saxham Halls, the ancestral seats of the Crofts. This collection was handed down in its entirety for generations, but was finally distributed amongst various members of the family.

* Sir William Crofts was the great grandson of Thomas Crofts, High Sheriff of Suffolk, in the thirty-seventh year of Elizabeth. Having been brought up from his youth at Court, he was appointed Captain of the Guard to Queen Henrietta Maria, and Gentleman of the Bedchamber to the Duke of York, by whom he was also sent to France in 1661 to congratulate Louis XIV. on the birth of the Dauphin. He enjoyed the confidence of the Stuarts, by his adherence to whom he had greatly suffered, and Charles II., while at Brussels, created him a peer of the realm under the title of Lord Crofts of Saxham. He afterwards became Gentleman of the Bedchamber to Charles II. and guardian to the Duke of Monmouth on the death of the latter's mother, Lucy Walters. Lord Crofts died in 1677 without male issue, and was buried in Saxham Church, where an elaborate marble effigy of him was erected and may still be seen. At his death the property passed to an uncle. West Stow Hall still remains, but his residence at Saxham was destroyed in 1771, together with a magnificent apartment which the former owner had added for the reception of Charles II. The estate at Saxham, however, was still in the possession of the Crofts family in the early part of the last century.

As this particular chair has the initials of I.R., it is clear that it must have been originally made over to a member of the Crofts family other than Lord Crofts, who died some eight years before James became King.

It is really surprising how many good chairs of this class are still to be found in various parts of the country with some sort of tradition or family history attaching to them. The University of Cambridge owns a highly ornate example, which is said to have been used by Charles II. when he visited the town. This chair was utilized for the purpose of seating our present Sovereign, King Edward VII., at the Senate-house on the occasion of his visit to Cambridge in March, 1904. At Christie's, in the same month, during the dispersal of the Townshend heirlooms, two pairs of very elaborate arm-chairs of Charles II.'s time were disposed of for sixty guineas per pair. The author has a vivid recollection of their ornate characteristics from seeing them when on a visit to Rainham Hall some years ago. Mr. Thomas Grylls, of Park Gate, East Finchley, has two remarkable arm-chairs, of a somewhat similar character to the Townshend examples, which formerly belonged to the noble family of Lovelace. They are of a date contemporary with the celebrated Lord Lovelace, who plotted so remorselessly against James II. on behalf of William of Orange, and may possibly have figured in the secret meetings of the Whig conspirators at Lady Place.

Inexperienced collectors should be on their guard against a species of bad imitation of the tall-backed Charles II. chair which was produced in large numbers during what is known as the Abbotsford period—that is, in the revival of the taste for antiquities which

was created by Sir Walter Scott. These abominations may be easily detected by their coarse and commonplace details, heavy imitations of natural flowering, by the vulgar turning of their spiral rails, and by an entire absence of restraint, the whole surface being covered with an excess of ornament.

Although oak chairs of the seventeenth century and later are plentiful, the same can hardly be said of domestic stools. What is known as the 'joint-stool'—a term which has already been explained—is not a difficult article to acquire, and rough specimens may be found all over the country. The writer has seen them disposed of in country market-places for half a crown apiece, these, however, being usually examples which the connoisseur of fine furniture would not be proud to possess. It will be noticed that joint-stools belonging to the latter part of the Stuart period had quite lost the beauty of members and outline which they possessed in earlier times. The superb example of Renaissance work mentioned in the last chapter, and figured on the left of page 71, would have been quite an impossibility in this degenerate age. An exceedingly interesting, though plain, specimen may be seen at the Buckingham Chapel at Whitchurch, near Edgware. This stool has a history. Handel, who was chapel-master to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, is credited with composing his oratorio of 'Esther,' for the consecration of his patron's chapel, and during his residence at the ducal mansion of

Canons he composed several anthems and other works, using this stool as he sat at work in the organ-loft.* The stool, which shows signs of considerable hard use, has plain classic pillars for legs, and is of extremely simple design, being a very characteristic example of the artistic severity of the latter end of the seventeenth century. One more anecdote of real life can be mentioned in which the great musician figures in company with a joint-stool. In Aylesbury Street, Clerkenwell, there lived in the reign of Queen Anne a worthy of the name of Thomas Britton, who, though but an itinerant small-coal vendor, became famous as being the first person to introduce the entertainment known as a concert into this country. His musical ability, and the success of the novelty which he presented, attracted towards him all the great musicians of the day. Amongst those who performed at his 'musical club' were Bannister, Dr. Pepusch, and the giant Handel himself. The celebrated violinist Dubourg also made his first appearance at one of these concerts, and, being at that time a mere child, was elevated, for the purpose of performing his solo, upon a joint-stool. We are informed by a contemporary that the juvenile débutant was so overcome by the splendour of the fashionable audience before whom he stood that he

* 'The church, although rebuilt about the year 1715, was not opened for divine service until the 29th August, 1720. . . . It is known that this piece was performed at Canons in the year 1720.'—'Beauties of England and Wales,' 1816.

The stool, though formerly in the organ-loft, has recently been moved into the adjoining vicarage.

lost his balance and was nearly precipitated from his impromptu pedestal to the ground.

The low Jacobean domestic stool, with stuffed or covered seat, such as we see at Knole and other great mansions, is a rarer article than the joint-stool, while foot-stools of any considerable age are excessively scarce. Most of the pieces passed off as such are merely abbreviated joint-stools which some accident, in the first instance, has shorn of their height. These can usually be detected by the falseness of their proportions, for the 'cut-down' article is an obvious eye-sore to the experienced collector and man of taste.

Henry Shaw, in his book on 'Ancient Furniture,' gives two interesting plates of chairs of the time of Charles II., one of them in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and said to have been actually given by that monarch to Elias Ashmole. The other chair, which is of a very similar character, was formerly in the collection of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill. Other examples of this type may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum. These chairs have very low backs which, instead of being padded, are fitted with small turned rails, repeating the form of the legs. The material used in most cases is ebony, ornamented in almost every available part with a profusion of carving. At first sight they have a somewhat Oriental appearance, due to the lack of leading lines in their surface carving; but on analyzing the latter, we find that it is merely a repetition of the meaning-

less scrolls, curves, and strewed flowers characteristic of late seventeenth-century work, though made somewhat under the influence of the East Indies. I have mentioned these chairs, although constructed of a material outside the scope of our subject, as they serve to emphasize the fact that this particular type of art seems to have been restricted to ebony. They are, however, specimens of some of the more elaborate furniture in vogue in the reign of Charles II.

In the reign of William III. the fashion arose of having two intersecting curved rails underneath the seat and but slightly distant from the floor, connecting the legs without adding any strength to the structure. A turned knob representing an inverted pendant was usually placed at the point of intersection of these rails. The backs of chairs were extremely high and constructionally weak, and generally had a laced panel, supported on either side by a pillar of nondescript design. A suite of furniture of this decadent type exists at Penshurst Place. In some much plainer examples the backs were merely shaped and padded, while in chairs that were composed solely of wood the back panel possessed the raised centre plane described in Chapter IV.

Now, if the student of antique furniture will examine the chair in Westminster Abbey, which was made as a companion to the Edwardian state chair on the occasion of the double coronation of William III. and Mary, he will find a curious indication of the insistence

of Metropolitan fashion. In the reproduction, although the lines of the older Gothic model are fairly well adhered to, the beautiful pointed arcade under the arms is entirely missing, being superseded by the raised centre panel, which also appears on the back. Queen Mary's coronation chair, in fact, has a Gothic outline with late classic details, proving that it was probably as difficult for the Court craftsman in furniture of the seventeenth century to reproduce the purity of an earlier pattern as it was for Sir Christopher Wren to complete the western towers of the Abbey without reverting to the fashionable revival in vogue in his day.

This aspect is strikingly opposed to the condition of country industries, which experienced considerable difficulty in breaking free from old traditions. In the modern Town Hall at Dorchester (by no means the sort of place in which one would expect to find such a relic) is an old arm-chair said to be indubitably that used by Judge Jeffreys in the 'Bloody Assize' at that town, when he passed sentence of death on nearly 300 prisoners. This chair has the raised centre plane in its back panel, surmounted by a characteristic piece of late seventeenth-century carving, but a critical connoisseur would hardly take the cabriole legs which support it in front as being of the date of James II. Another chair of the low leather-backed type which has associations with Jeffreys' visit to Taunton is fully described in the chapter on 'Vicissitudes of Old Furniture.'

One variety of the high-backed padded chairs of this period has stuffed flanges, or half sides, from which the arms project—a sort of compromise between the ordinary chair and the grandfather chair of the next epoch. Some very fine specimens of this description may be seen in the collection in the Brown Gallery at Knole House, that wonderful repository of seventeenth-century furniture. But we are now rather getting beyond the oak period as far as regards chairs, in the construction of which walnut and lacquered white woods began to be extensively employed, oak going out of vogue in the towns where fashion dwelt, though the use of the latter material still lingered in country districts.

Though it is outside the province of this book, I am tempted to mention a curious chair preserved in Fishmongers' Hall. As a chair it possesses claim to no great antiquity, having been constructed in 1830, but that the material of which it is made is extremely ancient the following inscription copied from the stone seat sufficiently testifies :

> 'I am part of the first stone that was put down for the foundation of Old London Bridge in June, 1176, by a Priest named Peter, who was Vicar of Colchurch, and I remained there undisturbed safe on the same old oak piles this chair is made from till the Rev. John Will. Joliffe, Curate of Colmer, Hamps., took me up in July, 1830, when clearing away the old bridge after new London bridge was completed.'

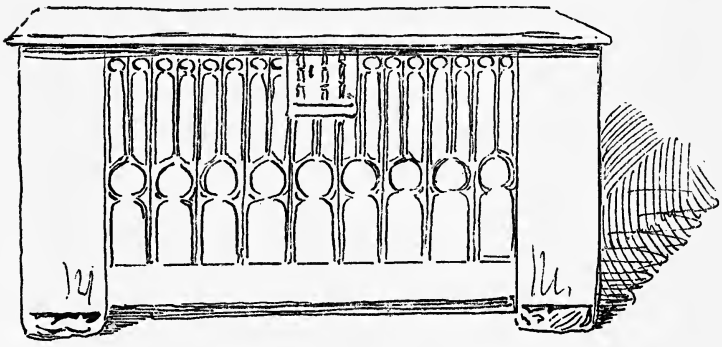
The rails in the back are ingeniously formed to represent the proportionate scale of the spans of the

four styles of bridges that have been built upon the original foundation. The feet of the chair spread out in a manner somewhat suggestive of Lord Savile's bed at Rufford Abbey, but as a whole the design is more curious than artistic.

Amongst abnormal pieces in this line notice should be made of a curious trick-chair mentioned in the diary of Samuel Pepys, which was so cunningly contrived that it seized upon the unsuspicious guest and detained him against his will: '1660, November 1. This morning Sir W. Pen and I were mounted early, and had very merry discourse all the way, he being very good company. We come to Sir W. Batten's, where he lives like a prince, and we were made very welcome. Among other things he showed me my Lady's closet, wherein was great store of rareties; as also a chair which he called King Harry's chaire, where he that sits down is catched with two irons, that come round about him, which makes sport!' Pepys cautiously refrains from mentioning whether he was one of the victims experimented upon, and he furthermore does not state how the subject of this sorry jest was released.

Antique models of chairs may occasionally be met with, though they are very rare. They exhibit great nicety of workmanship, and are complete in every detail. The elaborateness of such pieces points to their being something more than mere playthings, and whilst it is not impossible that these tiny articles are examples of the 'prentice's proficiency, it is more

probable that they were made as models for submission to the wealthy patron. The arm-chair depicted on page 96 was actually drawn from a model of this description measuring only some 14 inches in height.



FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN THE COLLECTION OF MORGAN S. WILLIAMS, ESQ

# CHAPTER VII

## COFFERS AND CHESTS FROM THE NORMAN TIMES TO THE RENAISSANCE

A GREAT deal may be said about the chests and coffers used by our forefathers, for they were perhaps their earliest staple pieces of furniture, and occupied an important place in not only the domestic household, but in the safe custody of muniments, clothes, and vestments. The oldest specimens of coffers which remain in England are most frequently found in the vestries of our country parish churches. These boxes were primarily made of great strength, and hence the name 'coffer,' which implies a single panel—a simple form of construction, affording the best protection against injury, and being the most suitable form for the transport of weighty articles.

In England there is a deplorable absence of characteristic woodwork of the Norman period remaining. At Brampton, Northants, is a coffer bound with iron-work in scrolls, which is said to be of the beginning of the thirteenth century. Viollet le Duc, who gave an illustration of this in his 'Dictionnaire Raisonné du Mobilier Français,' states that this 'bahut parait dater

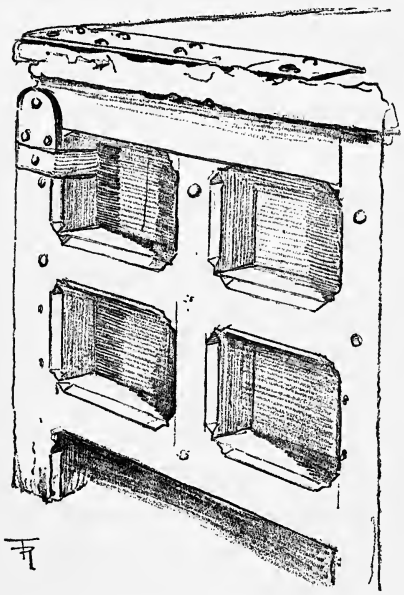
des dernières années du XII[e] siècle,' and also adds: 'A cette époque, d'ailleurs, la différence entre les meubles Anglo-Normands et les meubles Français n'est pas sensible.'

Wonderful as the Brampton coffer undoubtedly is, it is surpassed by a specimen in the Church of St. James, at Icklingham, near Bury St. Edmunds, which dates from pretty much the same time. It is in a magnificent state of preservation, front, lid, and sides being almost completely covered with iron scrollwork, terminating in trefoils and rosettes. In general character this piece is remarkably like the Brampton coffer, but with this difference—that the very smallest details can be studied. In both examples the iron coils are grooved, but in the Icklingham example the lid is slightly convex, and possesses three hoops.

Early Gothic chests of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were mostly of a very ponderous make, the front panel being supported by enormous stiles or uprights without any connecting transom rails, the bottom often being wedged by a peculiar inward curvature of the interior of the walls.

Coffers of the thirteenth century, if in their original condition, are mostly provided with a curious form of mechanism known as the pin-hinge. On the under side at each end of the lid are fastened two strong flanges of wood, which fit into slots sunk in the uprights. Through the back part of these flanges an iron pin is passed, thus allowing the lid to move as on a pivot, and obviating the necessity of hinges. The pins were

usually secured by a small piece of metal, of decorative form, which was fastened on the outside of the flanges. This detail of construction appears only in coffers of the Early English period.



END OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN SHERE CHURCH, SURREY, SHOWING PROTECTIVE CLAMPS AND PIN-HINGE

The earliest instance of carving more frequently takes the form of an arcade, lightly incised, or else of geometrical wheels. Examples of such coffers may be seen in Graveney Church, Kent; Stoke D'Abernon Church, Surrey; and Clymping Church, Sussex. A beautiful specimen of a thirteenth-century coffer formerly existed in Rustington Church, Sussex, which was furthermore ornamented with ironwork in bands. This, however, disappeared during the fifties, and lovers of such relics have since searched for it in vain. A coffer of rough make, but of the deepest interest to antiquaries, exists in the church of Heckfield, Hants. It is of the peculiar type which has just been described, but the only detail it possesses in the way of carving is a moulding of very early design, carved at the bases of the ponderous stiles. There is a money slot in the

centre of the lid, and the matrices of the hasps, which have now disappeared, show them to have been formed in the shape of a cross. It has been questioned whether this is not one of the Crusaders' alms-chests which were ordered to be set up in every church by Pope Innocent III. in 1199. Considering that the Heckfield coffer, as judged by what one may call internal evidence, is undoubtedly of thirteenth-century make, and apparently belongs to the earlier part of that century, there is good reason to believe that it may have been one of the boxes used for receiving alms for the prosecution of the fifth Crusade. And if this is the case, it would probably be one of the few examples to be found in England; for after the death of Richard Cœur de Lion interest in the Crusades languished in this country, the war against the Paynims being mainly prosecuted by the Franks. The point is an interesting one, and it may be noted that the Stoke D'Abernon coffer, which is of more ornate character, and perhaps some few years later, also has the slot for alms in the lid.

Many coffers and chests, from early down to very late times, were provided with a sort of shallow tray, running across one end, and close beneath the lid. This tray was sometimes fitted with a separate lid of its own, but in some cases, such as in the Stoke D'Abernon example, the coffer lid itself was pierced with a slot immediately above the tray, for the purpose of dropping money directly into it. I have known some very fair judges of antique oak who have not

hesitated to say that this tray is an essentially English feature ; but this statement can at once be disproved by reference to almost any of the specimens contained in Continental museums. The tray is peculiar to no country, being found in chests and coffers all over the Continent. Neither is it a characteristic of any particular period, but had its origin, no doubt, in the want of a small fixed receptacle for money. Instead of a tray, the money-box is sometimes actually a small fixture upon the floor of the coffer, as in the beautiful painted coffer in Newport Church, Essex. This example, which we have mentioned elsewhere, not only possesses, in addition to the money-box, a curious secret hiding-place for money, but the painted subjects inside the lid, which are of thirteenth-century date, are actually executed in an oil medium, thus conclusively proving that oil-painting was practised in England by monkish artists at a very early date.

In the first half of the fourteenth century the construction of coffers remained very much the same as in the preceding period, though the carved embellishment became more elaborate. It was not until the latter portion of the century that chests began to take the form of framework enclosing a multiplication of panels. Curiously enough, this advance in construction was actually heralded in some few cases by the carved decoration, which represents on the surface of a single coffer panel several compartments bearing tracery and enclosed in ornamental borders—a reversal of the process of evolution characteristic of later times.

An example of this peculiar superficial subdivision exists in the coffer in Dersingham Church, Norfolk. Fine specimens of chests of the Decorated period may be seen, amongst other places, in St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Oxford; Faversham Church, Kent; Haconby Church, Lincolnshire; Chevington Church, Suffolk; Alnwick Church, Northumberland; and Wath by Ripon, Yorkshire.

PANEL OF THE ALNWICK COFFER

The Faversham coffer is, in design, perhaps the most beautiful specimen of its kind in the country. The decoration of the front is in the form of an arcade, each bay being filled with elaborate tracery. The main arches are applied, as also are the

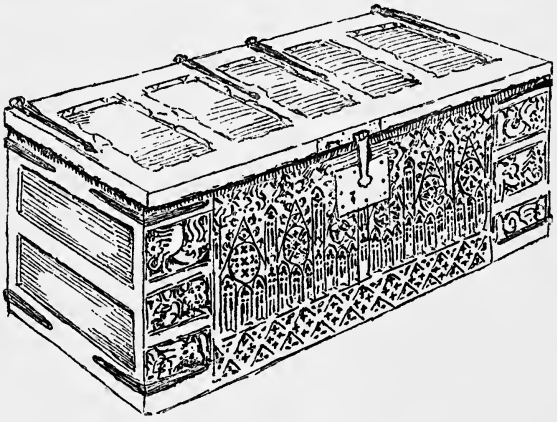
buttresses which support them. The construction of this coffer—or, at least, the front of it, for the sides and back have been villainously restored with deal—heralds the approaching change to framed panelling, which took place in the early part of the fifteenth century. This coffer possesses almost identical counterparts in Rainham Church, Kent, and St. John's Hospital, Canterbury, leaving little dobut that they are specimens of Kentish Gothic work produced by the same craftsman.

The coffers at Alnwick and Wath exhibit amongst their decorative carvings representations of huntsmen blowing horns and dogs hunting stags, as well as the usual chimæras on the uprights. In the Alnwick coffer, however, traceried decoration is absent, the front panel being divided into three longitudinal compartments carved with the subjects before mentioned.

The last-named coffer is traditionally said to have come from Jervaulx Abbey, but it is extremely probable, from the purely secular character of its decoration, that the Alnwick example was originally intended for other than ecclesiastical purposes. Two strange, winged human-headed figures which adorn the lower tier on the front panel are locally said to represent jesters, merely from the fact that they wear the hooded tippet, or liripipe, as it was anciently called. This peculiar form of head-dress was, however, commonly worn by the middle and lower classes during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and its representation gives no indication as to the meaning of the sculptures. There can be little doubt, from the remarkable similarity in

their decorative handling, that the Wath and Alnwick coffers, as well as a slightly later specimen at Brancepeth, emanated from the same workshop.

A particularly fine type of a fourteenth-century box, of a more developed type than those just mentioned, exists in Huttoft Church, Lincolnshire. This, though to all intents and purposes a coffer, being actually made with a single longitudinal panel in front, is divided into compartments fitted with applied decorated tracery, separated from each other by buttresses. It is evident that the craftsman subsequently learnt that the decoration carved on the surface of several panels was a truer and more satisfactory method of producing precisely the same effect.



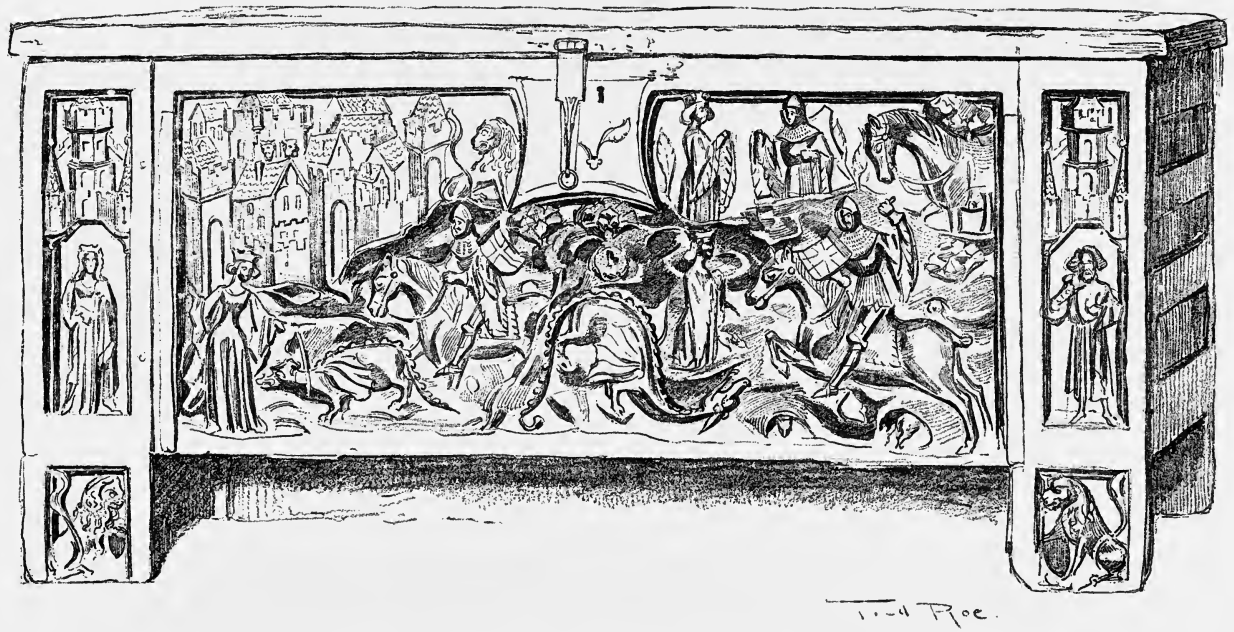
THE BRANCEPETH COFFER

The ornamentation of coffers of this period was not confined to formal architectural design alone, for we have some excellent specimens remaining which bear spirited scenes from the legend of St. George and the Dragon, tilting matches, and other popular amusements. It is noticeable that in these, architectural details, if represented at all, most frequently take the

form of castellated or domestic structures. Although these coffers are mainly deposited in churches, it is more than probable that their original use was secular; they may have been the depositories of the manor court rolls, or even have been employed in what was once known as the garderobe chamber. Owing to their exceeding scarcity, these specimens are generally regarded by those who have not studied the matter as of foreign production, in accordance with the usual tendency of the unskilled to attribute any unusual type which they cannot quite understand to a Continental origin. Specimens of this type may be seen in the Victoria and Albert and Dublin Museums, York Cathedral, and Harty Church, Kent, and at least one example exists in Belgium, which I think can be referred to English production.

There are very good grounds for assigning most of these so-called tilting-chests to the end of the fourteenth century. Details of costume, and especially armour, are unerring guides, and sufficiently prove this to be the case. What is termed the 'pig-snouted bascinet' appears upon the figures of the knights in most of them, and this form of headpiece, as well as the *dagging* or Vandyked border, which appears upon the edges of the long sleeves, are mannerisms peculiar to the reign of Richard II.

In the Musée de Cluny in Paris, however, are two coffers bearing armed figures, which belong to two different dates. The first exhibits on its front the figures of twelve knights armed *cap-à-pie*, and standing



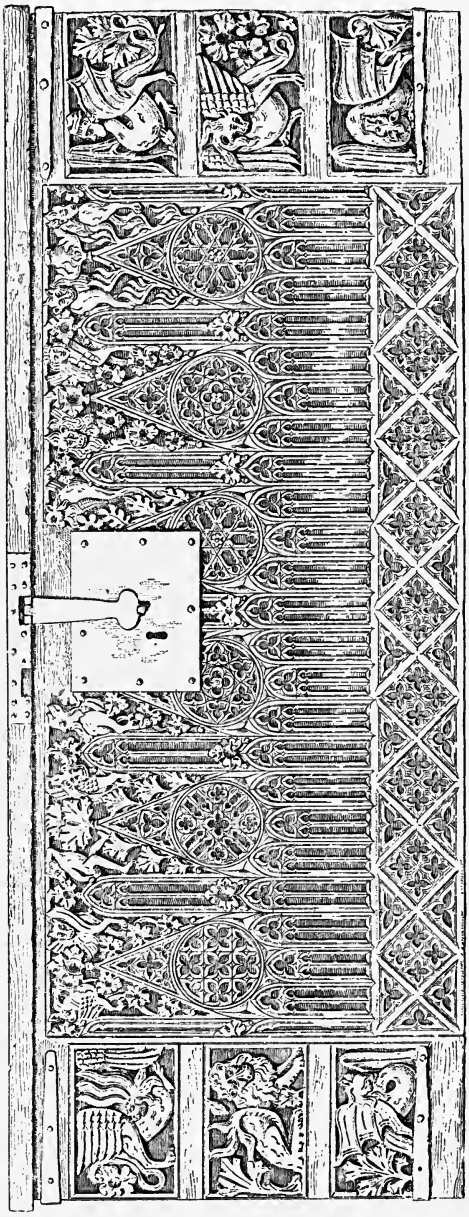
KNIGHTLY COFFER OF LATE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY WORK IN YORK MINSTER

Length, 6 ft. $2\frac{3}{4}$ in.; height, 3 ft. $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; depth, 2 ft. 6 in.; panel, 2 ft. $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. × 4 ft. 9 in.

beneath early ogival canopies. The lid, which is slightly convex, is carved with a variety of secular subjects, jousting, wrestling, and other amusements being represented. This coffer, which has been much restored, has been assigned by the highest authorities to the latter part of the thirteenth century, and its real origin dates probably not later than 1300. The other Cluny coffer is a much rougher production. The material of which it is constructed is light walnut, and the details of the arms and armour of the combatants on its front show it to be of a date not anterior to 1500. The lock on this latter coffer is a most elaborate and beautiful piece of hammered ironwork, but the execution of the wood-carving has such a singularly archaic appearance that it induces one to believe that the coffer came from some old-world district such as Provence, where most of the arts remained in a very backward condition.

The English tilting-chest which we have in the vestry of York Minster is actually a much finer specimen than either of these French coffers, and still retains traces of its original colouring and gilding. This piece deserves most careful study by all those interested in the art of the Middle Ages. The representations of the various phases of St. George's encounter with the dragon carved upon the front are executed in a remarkably spirited manner, the culminating-point of the decoration being the huge curved form of the stricken monster which appears beneath the lock-plate.

Though possessing striking similarities to the Dublin

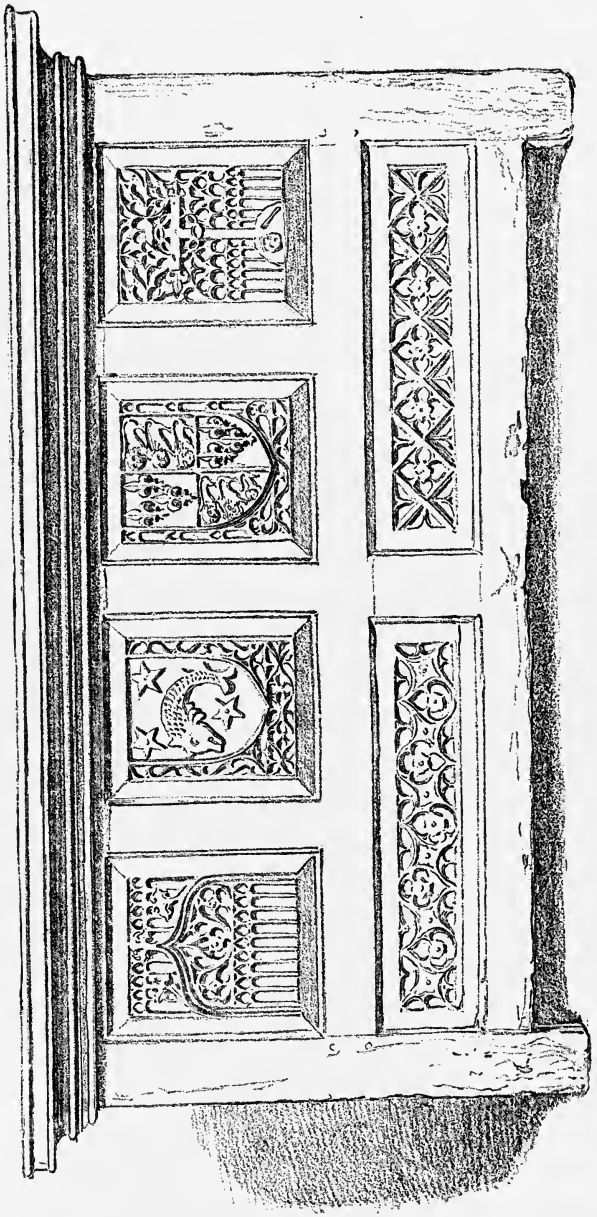


W. J. Pastill. 1890.

CARVED OAK COFFER OF THE PERPENDICULAR PERIOD IN BRANCEPETH CHURCH, NORTHUMBERLAND

and South Kensington coffer fronts representing the same legend, this magnificent piece of work, which is evidently by the same master-hand, shows much greater power of design. Forgeries of such coffers as we have just treated of are not unknown, but though most of the veritable specimens are known and located, it can hardly be said that it would be impossible to discover fresh examples. M. Peyre, who lived to our own time, acquired the curious little Gothic coffret carved with tilting knights, which was purchased with the rest of his collection for the nation, and may now be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

During the Perpendicular period coffers still continued to be made, though English productions of the fifteenth century are exceedingly scarce. Indeed, traceried boxes of national work of that period are almost as rare as the so-called tilting coffers, of which we have just given an outline. The chief reasons for this rarity have already been explained. The 'strangers artificers,' as they were then termed in the latter part of the fifteenth century, made their exportations to this country so seriously felt that Richard III., partly to popularize himself, no doubt, passed, in 1483, an Act prohibiting the importation of furniture of foreign workmanship under severe pains and penalties. Good specimens of coffers of the Perpendicular period exist in Brancepeth Church, Northumberland, and St. Michael's Church, Coventry, while foreign examples of the same date can be seen in the churches of Minehead, Somerset, and Southwold, Suffolk.



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLEMISH HUTCH IN MINEHEAD CHURCH, SOMERSETSHIRE

A very beautiful 'Flanders chest' was formerly in the church at Guestling, Sussex, but it has gone the same road as many other fine relics of the same nature, and the visitor to Guestling may search for it in vain. An excellent wood-cut in Parker's 'Glossary of Architecture' will give him a good idea of the appearance of this ornate piece.

Though 'Flanders chests' were freely imported during the fifteenth century, we must not necessarily attribute to every specimen which bears a flamboyant twist in its tracery a Continental origin : English east coast productions of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries often approached foreign designs in mannerism. Home manufactures may, however, usually be detected by greater boldness in their design and handling.

It is singular that so many fine early coffers should be found in an area which, roughly speaking, comprises the eastern fringe of England. Most of their characteristics are too intensely national to admit of a suspicion that these coffers were imported from abroad, but it may be that a freer intercourse with Continental traders, and the educational influence which contact with skilled foreign labour promoted, tended to foster high-class production in this quarter. In medieval manuscripts and inventories we frequently come across the words 'trussing chests,' or 'standards,' these being the contemporary names for large strong-boxes which were used for the purpose of transporting weighty articles. It will be noticed that some of the medieval

coffers are provided at each end with large rings, which are sometimes dependent from chains or bars of iron. When required for journeys a pole would be passed through these rings, and the chest would thus be slung across the backs of two mules. This feature may be seen amongst other examples in the treasure-chests which still exist in the Chapel of the Pyx at Westminster. At Chichester, too, there used formerly to be an early chest having ends clamped in the form of a grille and fitted with transport rings of this description. This interesting relic appeared to be locally an unconsidered trifle, and was not treated with the care that it deserved.

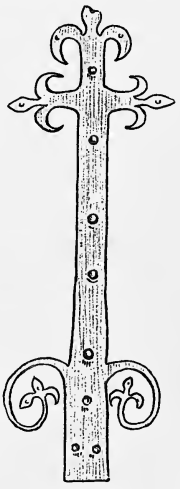
It was one of the most usual things for the cofferer of the Middle Ages to collaborate with the smith, and many splendid examples still remain to testify to the success attending their joint efforts. There are two semicircular cope-chests at York Minster strapped about with a sinuous entanglement of iron scrollwork in which the summit of elaboration may be said to have been reached. One of these monsters is actually covered next the wood with an outer skin of *cuir bouilli* to further protect its precious contents. Both of these examples probably date from late in the thirteenth century. Sometimes, as we have seen in the case of the Newport relic, the construction of the coffer became triple-barrelled, in which each craftsman played his part. A remarkable coffer, which was formerly in the Court of Chancery at Durham, but is now in private hands, is an example of this kind. It is

formed of massive slabs of oak, bound together with bands of wrought-iron terminating in double splays, the inner surface of the lid being painted *in tempera* with a mythical subject representing a combat between an armed centaur and the enemy of man. Two shields appear on each side of these figures, the charges being those of England and France quarterly, and the arms of the d'Aungerville family, one of whom, Richard de Bury, was Bishop of Durham, 1333-1345. It is probable that this coffer is one of two which are mentioned in contemporary accounts of the Bishop's funeral, and which the sacrist claimed as his right, with other effects.

The Rockingham Castle chest, well known from Parker's well-executed wood-cut of it, also comes under this category. It has been attributed to both the time of Henry V. and that of Edward IV., the latter date doubtless having been conjectured because of the chest displaying not only the arms of England, but also those of William, Lord Hastings, who was in the reign of Edward IV. appointed Constable of Rockingham Castle for his lifetime. In spite of this armorial evidence, the chest would seem, from certain indications, to be somewhat later in date than the reign of Edward IV.

The iron furniture or fittings of medieval coffers is a study in itself. Even when the pivot hinge was used in the thirteenth century, the lids of coffers were occasionally crossed with bands of iron, perhaps lightly decorated with a cross-hatched pattern, as in the very early Graveney example. Later on these bands were merely extensions of the hinges, and they were sometimes carried round the structure so as completely to

envelope it. A coffer in Debenham Church, Suffolk, has a series of iron bands, nine in number, on its lid, the ends of which are fashioned in the form of scroll-work and conventional leafwork. In the chapel of Haddon Hall is also a coffer of immense length composed of oak slabs at least $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, the lid of which is further strengthened with bands of iron decorated with the fleur-de-lis. This coffer, which seems but little known, should be examined by all interested in medieval furniture. Many works have been written and illustrated on the subject of Haddon Hall and its woodwork, but this coffer, which was actually one of the ancient possessions of the Vernons, has, curiously enough, despite its intense interest, remained unnoticed. Besides bearing the decorative metal strapwork on its lid and corners, the front is carved with the arms of the Vernon family, enclosed in sunk circles bordered with a trefoil ornament. The corners are dove-tailed together in a rather obvious manner, which suggests a date about the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but the shape of the shields points to an earlier date, rendering it somewhat difficult to 'place' the piece with accuracy.



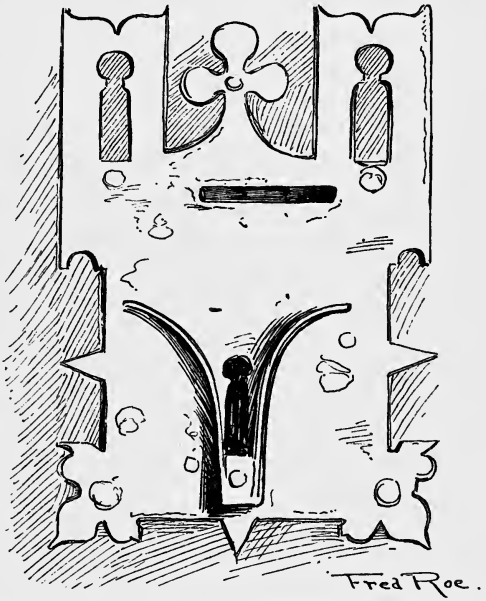
STRAP HINGES ON LID OF COFFER IN THE CHAPEL AT HADDON HALL

Very few of the original locks and lock-plates remain on coffers or chests constructed previous to the latter

half of the sixteenth century. Mention may be made, however, of a few notable and splendid examples. The painted coffer at Newport retains its original lock and lock-plate, fastened on with large square-headed bolts, and is perhaps the earliest complete example of its kind now remaining. Original locks of artistic design and fine construction also remain on the tilting-coffer in York Minster, and the elaborate Renaissance chest in East Dereham Church, Norfolk, though the former appears to be, and the latter most certainly is, of foreign workmanship. The hasp of the York coffer is fashioned in the shape of a dragon, a favourite form of decoration on the Continent, whilst the Dereham lock-plate is a typical specimen of pierced Flemish (or French) flamboyant work.

On lock-plates of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we frequently find a V-shaped piece of metal, raised above the surface of the plate and surrounding the keyhole. This V piece sometimes splays out into a leaf ornament or other decorative form, as in the York coffer. I do not know if any conjectures have been hazarded by antiquaries as to its use or intention, but, regarding it in a practical light, there only seems, to me at least, one reasonable explanation. Artificial light was in its infancy in these dark ages, and the feeble oil-lamps which made some apology for illuminating the halls and dwellings of our ancestors were so palpably inefficient that the ridge of metal gave some assistance to the sense of touch when it became necessary to open the coffer or chest at night-time.

Anyone who has tried the experiment of fitting a key into one of these medieval locks by the dim light of a winter's dusk will realize at once the great practical assistance which these V-flanges afford. This simple contrivance was fitted to the locks of doors as well, and the feature might advantageously be revived in these modern times in the interests of those who for any reason experience a difficulty in inducing their latch-key to perform its office.



CHEST LOCK-PLATE, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Of plain, iron-sheathed or banded coffers there are plenty remaining, but the probability is that the greater number of them belong to a period not earlier than the sixteenth century. With the cessation of decorative forms in their ironwork, interest in these productions becomes considerably curtailed.

At the end of the fifteenth century the linen and *parchemin* panels began to come into vogue in England, where they rapidly supplanted tracery decoration. Linen-panelled chests are still fairly easy to discover,

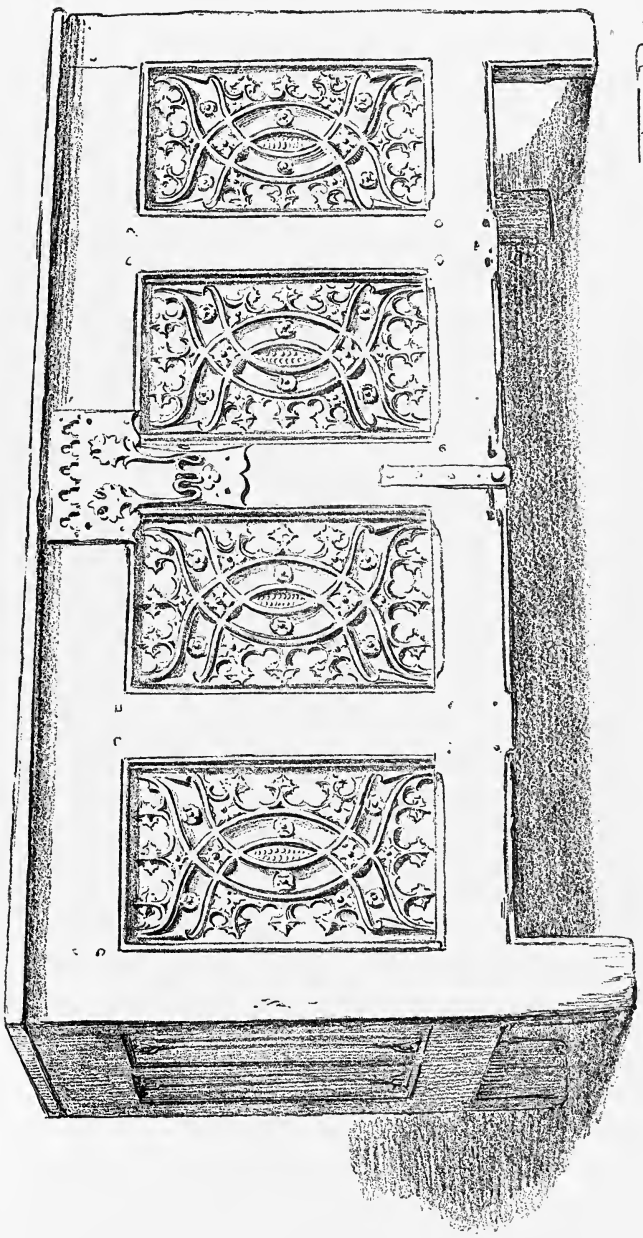
but they mainly belong to the sixteenth century. The earlier specimens may usually be detected by their more weighty method of construction. Linen and *parchemin* panels on chests are always enclosed with framing. I have never yet met with a box of the coffer construction carved with either of these decorations, nor have I heard of one from other antiquaries. Chests with linen panel fronts are to be met with fairly frequently in old mansions and private collections, or even in the London sale-rooms, but they are not often to be seen in churches.

Though this work does not pretend to treat at all fully on foreign methods or styles and their intermediate variations, it is expedient to notice here some peculiarities connected with certain articles of Continental make. The first instance is the intersection of stile-mouldings — *i.e.*, the crossing of the raised members at the corners of panel-framings, something after the manner of what is now known as an Oxford frame. It is certain that this style was never employed on English-made furniture, though it was extensively used on the productions of France, Flanders, and parts of Germany. Now, international differences in linen panelling are often so vague that if the mouldings on the pieces are only of ordinary design, it is difficult —nay, almost impossible—to determine their source. Chests or cupboards need not necessarily be of foreign make, even if they are furnished with German iron fittings, for these accessories were extensively sent over by the Hanseatic League. Directly, however,

that a piece exhibits the intersected mouldings which we have just referred to—no matter how bluff and simple its lines may be—it may safely and without a doubt be assigned to a Continental source—that is, if the piece be true; and the detection of this detail may occasionally prove of the greatest value in coming to a decision as to the nationality of debatable linen-panelled productions.

Another peculiarity attaches to certain German and Flemish chests, and has led to the ignorant mutilation of many of their kind. A complete and typical specimen, though not the finest of its class, may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 1,750-1,869. Chests of this type are large in size, and supported on rather longer legs than the generality of their brethren. The panels in the front are generally ornamented with *parchemin* decoration, and those in the sides with the linen fold, but the curious feature which has been alluded to is a sort of skirting, veiling the space beneath the chest, and formed by a repetition of the upper panels and their dividing stiles. This skirting, however, was only formed of half-panels, descending direct on to the floor, without any base rail whatever, thus giving the piece an appearance of having been cut down and shorn of several inches of its original height. The construction of this detail at the base is faulty in the extreme, for when the trenails, or pegs, which held these depending stiles in their place became loose, the skirting gave way for want of proper support, and dropped out. It has, however

frequently happened that the complete piece has come into the hands of some third-rate dealer or inexperienced amateur, who, ignorant of the peculiar characteristic of the object, has become possessed of the insane idea that, from the lack of the lower half of the bottom panels, as well as the absence of a transom rail at the base, the chest must necessarily have been sawn down. In order, therefore, to hide what the temporary owner, regarded as a mutilation, the piece was cunningly deprived of these tell-tale demi-panels at the base and reduced to the condition of an ordinary chest elevated on rather high legs. This has been done in dozens of cases, but once the trick is known the evidence of the mutilation is not difficult to detect—viz., the holes in the front transom bar for the trenails on which the dwarf stiles of the skirting hung; and the only explanation of them and the accompanying grooves for the missing panels is obviously that which I have indicated. The purpose of this skirting may be conjectured. It does not exist at the sides, but solely in the front, and therefore can only have been intended to screen any articles, such as shoes, which might be thrust beneath the chest from either side. There can scarcely be any other interpretation of so strange a feature. Many of these chests exist in a complete state, but by far the greater number have, either by design or accident, lost their characteristic trait. The feature of a front skirting is not unknown in France, but the chests which we find bearing it are nearly all German or Flemish. To recapitulate: If



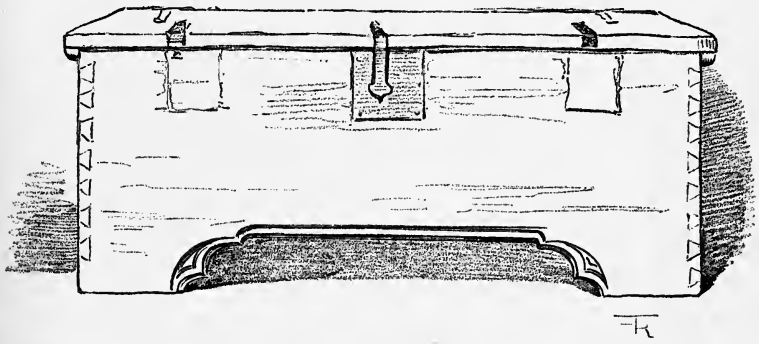

LATE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CHEST, WITH PANELS OF GERMAN DESIGN

any reader has a large *parchemin* panelled chest in his possession which exhibits mortise holes in the bottom of the lower transom rail corresponding to those above, it is more than probable that the piece—if genuine — once possessed such a skirting at its base, and, in this event, it was certainly not made in England.

It does not very often happen that the linen panels are inserted longitudinally, and it is really rare to find pieces of antique furniture in which the linen fold occupies that position exclusively. A curious piece was recently sold at Christie's, however, which had this peculiarity. It had three small drawers at its base, with a box above, the whole front, as well as one of the ends, being panelled in this peculiar manner. From the circumstance of one end being without decoration, it is evident that the piece of furniture was intended to occupy a corner position, while from the manifest signs of wear on the lid it must have been used as a seat, and most probably was originally intended to occupy the place of an ingle nook, where it could be used as a receptacle and as a rest. The linen fold is extremely simple in character, and might have belonged to any country, but a close observer could see the interlacing mouldings, to which we have just been referring, at the corners of the panels, and this at once stamped it as a foreign production.

Chests during medieval times were often provided with wooden bars or clamps underneath, in order to

give increased support to the structure, and prevent bulging under excessive weight. We find this feature more often on Continental productions, but I am unable to say it was altogether a foreign one. For instance, in the Church of St. Sepulchre, at Northampton, there is a dome-topped coffer of sixteenth-century type, with three locks, which still retains its clamps. It is probable that in the greater number of cases the clamps, being detachable, have been lost, and it is not unreasonable to conjecture that most chests constructed with framework once possessed them.



COFFER IN ST. LAWRENCE'S CHURCH, EVESHAM, SHOWING DOVE-TAILING AT CORNERS, COMMENCEMENT OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The construction of coffers of the earlier Gothic type has already been touched upon. With regard to the later examples, it is perhaps sufficient to observe that they were always fastened together with wooden pegs or trenails, iron only being used for hinges, clamps, and locks. Dove-tailing, which was practised in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in a secret form, so as to give strength to the coffer without being visible

from the outside, in late Gothic times was carried out in quite an open manner. A series of small fantailed mortises interlocking with each other at the corners may be sometimes seen on late Gothic coffers, such as that in the church at Evesham. It may be doubted, however, whether this form was practised—at any rate in England—before the beginning of the sixteenth century.

MEDALLION HEAD ON PANELLING, TEMP. HENRY VIII., SHOWING CLASSIC FORM OF HELMET ADOPTED BY CARVER OF THE PERIOD

## CHAPTER VIII

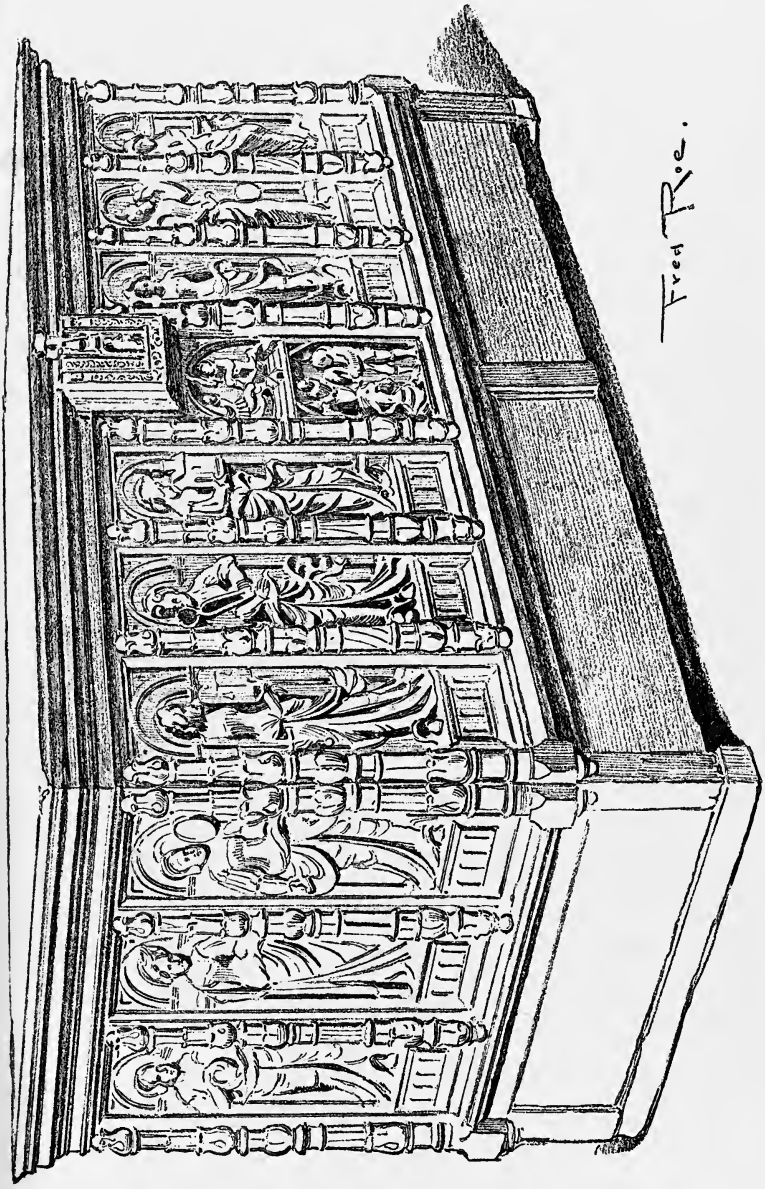
### COFFERS AND CHESTS AFTER THE RENAISSANCE

WITH the advent of the roundel or medallion, it was not uncommon for chests to be carved with this form of decoration upon their front panels, while those exhibiting the linen fold were relegated to the ends. English chests of this period exhibiting portrait medallions are not very frequently met with, and this feature appears to have been a much more common form of decoration in France, where the medallions and portraits sometimes attain a very large size. On the finest specimens of this class, both in England and elsewhere, the heads would appear to be portraits of the members of the family who commissioned the piece from the craftsman, perhaps more or less fancifully treated, but on commoner examples the heads are often grotesque, and sometimes hideously ugly. In common with the designs on tapestry and other household decorations, helmets and body armour, when exhibited on these figures, take the Roman form after the pseudo-classic style popular during the Renaissance. Chests of this period are sometimes provided with a singular and almost unnecessary feature—the

addition of a dwarf leg or foot in the centre of the front.

The mouldings at the edges of the framework about this time began to show degeneration from the beautiful Gothic forms which had hitherto embellished furniture, in some cases being carried round only one or two sides of the frame, and being supplanted in the others by the stop-chamfer. When the ornamental strap-hinge disappeared, its place was taken by the two interlocking, ring-headed staples driven through the wood, and having their ends flattened back. The importation of 'Flanders chests' still continued during the early years of the Renaissance. A magnificent specimen of the time of Henry VIII. remains in East Dereham Church, Norfolk—probably the finest of its kind in the kingdom. This chest is elaborately buttressed, and its panels are carved with female figures habited in costume and head-dress of the period, typifying the various arts and crafts. The lock is a most elaborate piece of flamboyant work in wrought-iron. The chest was presented to the church in 1786 by one Samuel Rash, who has recorded an amusing fallacy concerning its history on a brass plate affixed to the lid.*

* 'As a token of Respect towards his Native Place, Samuel Rash, Esqre., on the 1st day of Jany., 1786, Presented to the Church of East Dereham THIS CHEST for the Purpose of keeping together and Preserving the Deeds, Records, and other Writings belonging to this Parish. Tradition says this Curious Chest (and lock) is upwards of Four Hundred Years Old, was taken out of the Ruins of Buckenham Castle, and many Years since the Property of the Noble Family of the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk, and supposed to be used by them for Depositing their Money and other Valuables.'



'FLANDERS CHEST' IN EAST DEREHAM CHURCH, NORFOLK, TEMP. HENRY VIII.
Height, 3 ft. 9 in. ; length, 6 ft. ; width, 2 ft. 6 in.

From the symbolical nature of the figures on its front and sides it would seem probable that its original purpose was connected with some guild or fraternity of craftsmen.

A curious oak coffer, which shows the lingering of the debased style of Gothic, exists in the church of Cottingham, Northamptonshire. This receptacle, which is of large size, stands high from the floor, the front being supported by two spandrels incised with a conventional rose and leaf. The front panel is carved in three courses, the upper and middle ones exhibiting a band of trefoil ornament resembling the so-called Tudor flower and the sinuous rose trail respectively, while on the lower tier, which is divided into compartments, appear the Tudor rose, two wheels of Scandinavian character, and a geometrical device bearing some likeness to, and by some held to be, the spread-eagle, the cognizance of Spain. It is undoubtedly an English production, and may possibly date from the reign of Philip and Mary. Its construction, which is simply that of planks butted together without stiles, the taller ends alone resting on the floor, represents a change from the method of the Gothic craftsmen, which as truly indicates its comparatively late origin as the debased nature of the design carved on its front.

One form of coffer closely associated with the period of the Renaissance is that which is fitted with the dome-top or barrel-lid. Such pieces are almost invariably bound with iron straps, and occasionally constructed of some lighter wood than oak. Made rather

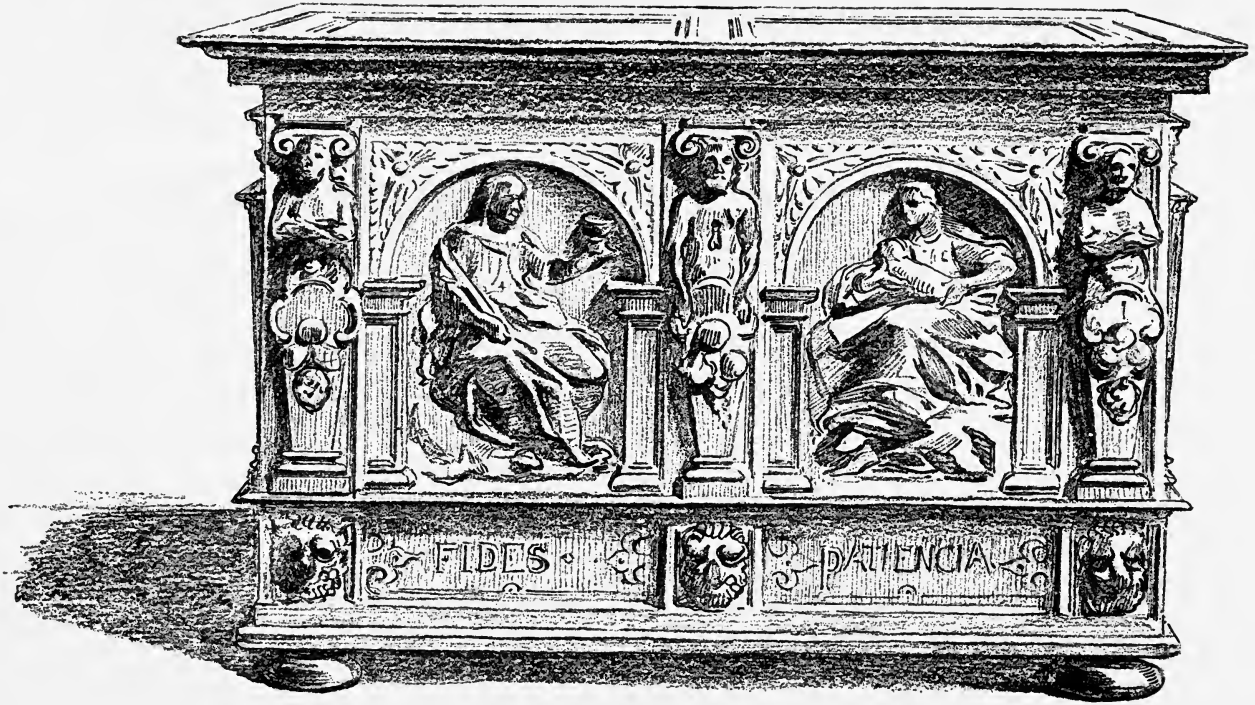
for security than ornament, these massive safes are often sheathed in a perfect network of iron bands, yet from their very plainness there is little to indicate their proper date, except such character as may be found in the locks and hasps. By the unskilled they are generally regarded as belonging to the Norman period—mainly for no better reason than that, in common with the arch of that period, they are round-topped. At Minster, in Kent, at Northampton, at Letheringset, in Norfolk, and in the neighbourhood of most English churches where these round-topped coffers remain, a vague legend will be found to exist fathering their origin upon the Norman conquerors of England. The coffers at Letheringset and Minster have their lids formed from the solid half of a tree—a cheap, easy, and very efficient method of closing a receptacle, and one from which the modern term 'trunk' is actually believed by some to be derived. In most cases, however, such scanty evidences as the fittings of these relics afford point to a much later period. It is quite possible that coffers of this kind may have been in use during Norman times, but I must confess that I have been unable to discover contemporary evidence. The massive round-topped coffer at Rockingham Castle, which is reputed—from what evidence I know not—to belong to the time of John, presents certain unusual features in its construction which seem to point to a remote period; but here, again, the fashion of its hasps hardly bears out the theory of so great an age. In the case of the barrel-lid coffer known as 'King Edward's

travelling chest,' in the Pyx Chapel, Westminster, some curious details may be observed which would seem to the critical eye to point to a more remote period than that of the Renaissance. These are the ringed attachments to facilitate removal by mules (which are in themselves a very early feature), and the small projecting buttons to its central hasps. A round-topped coffer at Tempsford Church, Bedfordshire, has hasps of precisely the same character, but this specimen only opens at its centre, the movable lid measuring about a third of its length. The lock plate also displays remains of Gothic scrollwork in wrought-iron, similar to the feature mentioned in the last chapter. The Pyx Chapel coffer is interesting from its being possibly a receptacle made to replace one which was previously injured or destroyed during the Great Robbery in 1303, but its actual date is, to say the least of it, debatable. It is certain, however, that this relic, like the Tempsford example, belongs to a period anterior to the generality of our barrel-lidded coffers now remaining. On the other hand, we are able to date some specimens of this type with accuracy as belonging to the sixteenth century. Mention may be made of two such—viz., the huge iron-sheathed coffer in the Castle Buttery, Durham, which has been indubitably proved to be that constructed by the Commissioners of Henry VIII. in order to contain the crumbling remains of St. Cuthbert, and a considerably smaller example in Faversham Church, Kent, which was actually left by the will of one Henry Rate in 1533 'to keep jewels

and plate in.' The latter, as well as the so-called Norman example at Minster, is constructed of some soft wood, and is in the last stage of decay.

Among curiosities in the shape of iron-bound coffers, notice should be taken of a remarkable specimen in Louth Church, Lincolnshire. The bottom of this strong-box is formed of an immensely thick slab of oak, which was at one time embedded in the floor, thus frustrating effectually any attempt to remove the coffer from its proper resting-place.

During the reign of Henry VIII. inlay was employed lavishly in the decoration of some of the more sumptuous pieces of furniture, but, as we would expect from the Italian models which they followed, the form of the objects to which the inlay was applied was flat and wanting in contour. In Elizabeth's time inlay was applied to chests and cabinets as supplemental to the fine effects of light and shade in the carving. The mouldings of the Elizabethan period are frequently very broad and embellished with jewelwork ; the panels, on the other hand, are mostly smaller than those of the succeeding reigns, giving great richness of effect. The uprights in fine chests of this period are often carved with caryatides, or sometimes fashioned in the form of trusses decorated with a leaf ornament. More often than not the form which these caryatides took did not follow the graceful classic lines of the pure Italian style, frequently assuming the appearance of savages, or 'sylvan men,' as they were called. On some of the most elaborate specimens these figures




SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CHEST

In the possession of Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A. Height, 2 ft. 2 in.; depth, 2 ft. 1 in.; width of chest, 3 ft. 1½ in.; extreme width of lid, 3 ft. 5½ in.

were often somewhat rudely sculptured, even when placed in conjunction with the very finest of inlay and strap ornament. Occasionally, however, we meet with pieces in which the Italian influence is stronger and truer, such specimens possessing caryatides finely modelled, as in Mr. Seymour Lucas's chest depicted on page 146. This interesting example shows so pronounced a Southern character that its origin would be unhesitatingly assigned by many to the Italian States; but, in spite of its ironwork, which smacks of an Austro-Germanic source, and the ultra-classic details of its carving generally, I believe it to be mainly a home production. That the craftsman who fashioned it was deeply impressed with the traditions of Italy there is every evidence, but the difference between such pieces as this and the more strictly national productions of the late sixteenth century may be accounted for by the hypothesis that one craftsman had travelled far afield and profited by his investigation, while the other received his impressions of classic art at third hand. While admitting the difficulty of absolutely classifying so debatable a piece, there seems to be a character about the figures of the virtues carved on the recessed panels which savours more of English handiwork than of Italian, while the existence of the Hanseatic League may supply an explanation of the mystery of the ironwork. A nice detail may be observed in the central caryatid, whose arms are unfolded to accommodate the introduction of a keyhole. Chests produced during the Elizabethan period are

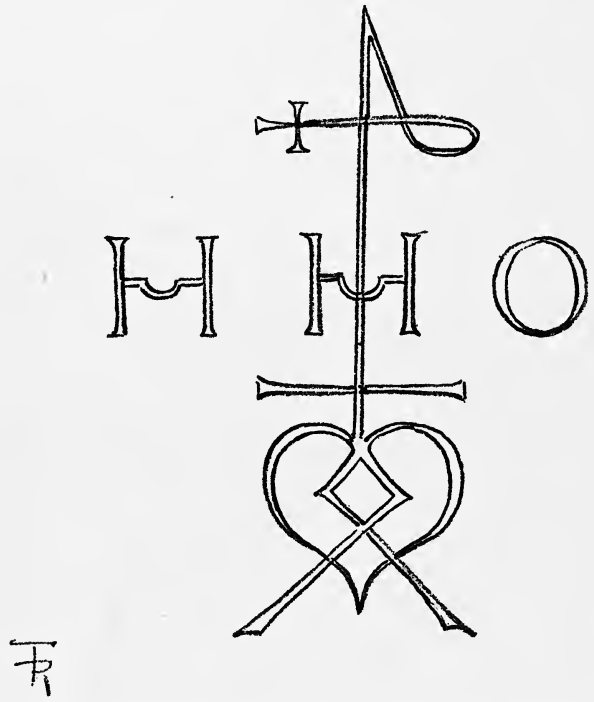
frequently constructed of three or four different kinds of wood, oak and chestnut in the framework being associated with holly, walnut, and elm in the surface decoration. It occasionally happens that the caryatides which decorate the chest front are themselves formed of the lighter material, but these instances are rare. Inlay upon the panels usually took the form of an interlaced geometrical strap, or more rarely of sprays of conventional flowers somewhat resembling pinks. They were also frequently adorned with a series of little views representing elevations of buildings which popular fancy nowadays asserts to be Nonsuch House, but which might possibly be the more recent Palace of Theobald's or some other noble seat.* Some superb specimens of these types are in the possession of Ernest Crofts, Esq., R.A., Keeper of the Royal Academy; General Sir Coleridge Grove, K.C.B.; the Ven. Archdeacon J. J. Lawrence, of St. Albans; and

* The extraordinary building known as Nonsuch House was erected near Ewell, in Surrey, during the reign of Henry VIII., and for a century remained an object of wonder and admiration. Its name is said to have originated in the fantastic character of its magnificence; but, whether this be true or not, the storied turrets flanking its corners certainly bore a great resemblance to the representations of palaces which appear upon certain inlaid chests of sixteenth and seventeenth century work. Nonsuch House, which was the most favoured residence of Queen Elizabeth, retained a moderate amount of royal favour during the two succeeding reigns, but was eventually demolished by the Duchess of Cleveland, to whom it had been granted by Charles II. No vestige of the building now remains, but engravings of it may be seen in Braun and Hohenburg's 'Civitates Orbis Terrarum' and Speed's 'Theatre of Great Britain.'

Sydney W. Lee, Esq., of Putney Hill. Every one of these examples is essentially English in all its characteristics. Mr. Crofts' chest in particular should be commented upon. It is a fine piece, having its front decorated with caryatides, and exhibiting most of the usual Elizabethan details. The long drawer, however, at its base, indicates a later period. The inlaid views of buildings which are pictured beneath the depressed arches also show, on close examination, what is technically known as rusticated architecture — a fashion which came into vogue after Elizabeth's time. Finally, on the top rail, beneath the lid, one can discern the inlaid inscription 'A 1653 D'—a date one is accustomed to associate with the severe plainness of the Puritan period. It may be mentioned that this chest possesses two hiding-places.

In St. Mary's Church, Lichfield, immediately opposite the historic birthplace of Dr. Samuel Johnson, are two Elizabethan chests, one of them a superb carved and inlaid production, as fine a thing of its kind as can be seen. A more elaborate example, and one which evidently exhibits the skill of a very up-to-date craftsman, may be seen in the north transept of the Church of St. Saviour, Southwark, or, as it was anciently called, St. Mary Overie. This supremely sumptuous and beautiful piece, though perhaps of no later date than the Lichfield chest, is much more advanced in design, exhibiting the finest architectural characteristics of the later Renaissance, and being, therefore, in this respect, ahead of its time. It is of

grand dimensions, having three small drawers at the base, the structure above bearing exquisitely proportioned pilasters and pediments as well as window-shaped panels, around which the surface of the wood-



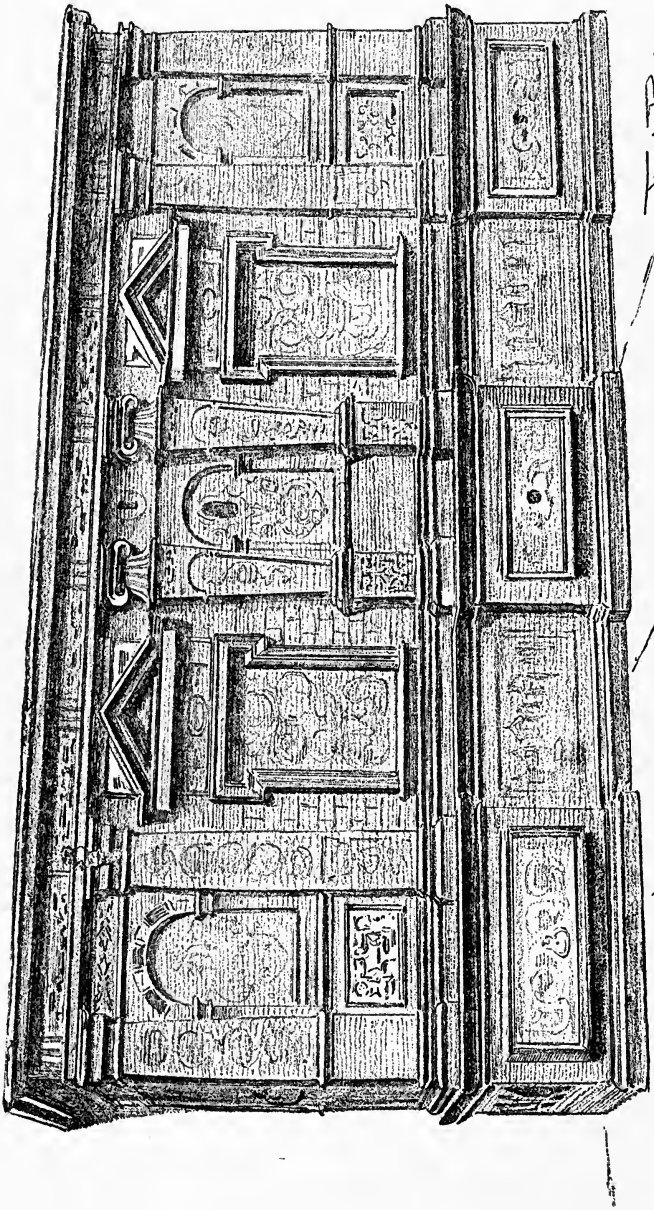
DEVICE AND INITIALS ON LID OF THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MUNIMENT CHEST IN ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH, SOUTHWARK

work is marked with squares to resemble masonry.* The strapwork on the frieze and the bases of the

* There is reason to believe that the three drawers are additions of a later date, being merely fronted with the inlaid surface, which was cut out from the plinth of the chest for their reception. The sides and back, as well as the edge mouldings round their front, are merely of common deal.

pilasters is both delicate and elaborate, while the flat surfaces are inlaid with floral emblems and coats of arms. As an architectural piece this chest, which seems little known, is one of the finest in existence. It will be noticed that amidst the inlaid strapwork on the lid are the initials H. H. O., connected with a geometrical guild mark, being those of the donor, Hugh Offley, Sheriff of London in 1588, and his son-in-law, Harding. Hugh Offley was a city merchant, who was Master of the Leather-sellers' Company in 1577-1578, and again in 1584-1585, afterwards becoming Alderman and Sheriff. He was a man of unusual munificence, even for a London merchant. 'His donation of "one gilt standing cup with cover" weighing 42½ ounces is recorded in Liber Curtes, p. 298, under date 8 August, 1578.' Shortly before his elevation to the Shrievalty he '"set forth, at his own expense, a costly show of Prince Arthur with his Knights of the Round Table," in the presence of Queen Elizabeth at Mile End Green.'* There can be little doubt that Offley gave the chest to mark the year of his tenure of office, and it would therefore have been placed in the church less than fifty years after Prior Linsted surrendered the establishment to Henry VIII.—a singular fact when one considers its relatively late character. In an early part of Chapter IV. mention was made of an inlaid classic panel, dated 1569, which exists in the Cross Keys Hotel at Saffron Walden.

* 'History of the Leather-sellers' Company,' by William Henry Black, F.S.A., 1887.




THE 'OFFLEY CHEST,' ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH, SOUTHWARK

The chest at St. Saviour's and this panel should be compared, and may be adduced as instances of what peculiarly advanced work was being carried out by the more progressive craftsmen side by side with the old types.

Inlaid articles of furniture of the Elizabethan period are now so much sought after that many really excellent and genuine plain chests, as well as other articles, are frequently spoilt by modern inlay, barbarously added 'to meet the demand.' It rarely happens, though, that these doctored pieces succeed in deceiving the practised eye.

One may occasionally meet with panelled chests bearing grotesquely-carved heads, somewhat resembling the productions of the early Renaissance, which do not, however, actually belong to a period anterior to the early part of the seventeenth century. Many good judges have been deceived by this fanciful resemblance, and at least one chest of this type may be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum wrongly ascribed to the early part of the sixteenth century.* Along the top rail of these chests is invariably incised some such inscription as 'FERE GOD,' or 'GIVE TO THE POR FOR THE LORD SAKE,' that in the Kensington Museum exhibiting the legend: 'FERE GOD ✣ LOVE GOD ✣.' The portrait panels (if these distorted carvings can be so termed) are generally alternated with others carved with a leaf or flower of unknown variety, bearing a distant resemblance to the con-

* No. 833, 1898.

ventional representations in vogue during the reigns of the last Henrys. Evidences of their later origin may be detected in the shape of the lettering appearing on them, the degeneracy of their mouldings, the weak, imitative character of the heads, and lastly, but not least, in the fact that these grotesque representations are not enclosed in medallions, but merely surrounded by a square roughly incised on the surface of the panels. I have studied with interest a good many of these chests, and in nearly every instance have succeeded in tracing their origin to a limited area in the West of England. They all bear evidences of the same individuality in mannerism, and there can be no doubt whatever that they proceeded from the workshop of some seventeenth-century craftsman, who clung to the traditions of an earlier style, from which he was unable entirely to free himself.

Chests of an architectural type, both as regards design and inlaid embellishment, were very much in vogue during the reign of Charles I. The inlaid views of mansions, such as Nonsuch House, were also perpetuated, these being mere elevations and not perspective views, as in the Dutch fashion, of the second Charles's reign. Such chests are for the most part indifferent in construction and design, and not to be compared in any way with the magnificent earlier example in St. Saviour's Church, Southwark. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the Elizabethan chest, decorated with caryatides and inlay, and a similar article of fine quality produced about the

middle of the seventeenth century; but a narrow inspection will occasionally discover slight indications of changes in the architectural style of these buildings, fanciful as they are. A certain amount of floral embellishment, by means of inlay, continued to be carried out, though this latter form of decoration was not practised so frequently as at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

Chests of the Stuart period mainly followed the lines of their Elizabethan predecessors, but with this exception—the mouldings were reduced in size, and the outline, as well as the light and shade effect, was consequently less rich, whilst the carved decoration, such as strapwork, was of poorer design and execution. The panels themselves were often subdivided or quartered up, as in Elizabethan times, but the moulding shows a poverty of design compared with earlier work.

The Kilburne chest, which is dealt with very fully in the chapter on 'Vicissitudes of Old Furniture,' is an excellent specimen of the type of chest which was in use during the Stuart times, and which bore a fanciful resemblance to work produced in the latter part of the sixteenth century. An illustration of the simpler methods employed in the decoration of chests during the Stuart period may be observed in the treatment of the familiar classic arch which adorns their panels. In Elizabethan times these arches were built up piece by piece—plinth, pilaster, capital, and arch—as in an actual building, whereas the corresponding decoration in

Charles I.'s time was generally merely incised into the panel, producing a shallow effect, with infinitely less light and shade than its prototype.

Nevertheless, some of the chests fashioned about Charles I.'s time have architectural fronts, 'built up,' as it were, plain, with but little surface carving, and possessing a well-proportioned classic simplicity which is very picturesque and pleasing, being dearer, in fact, to brethren of the brush than many of the more elaborately-embroidered productions. Mr. E. Barry, of Ockwells Manor, possesses a fine chest of this character, bearing on its top rail the inscription '16 E.W. 47,' the year being that in which the capture of Charles was effected by Cornet Joyce. A variation from the carved ornamentation of this period may be found in some of the plain panelled boxes which crop up in the Midlands, and which occasionally bear the initials 'C.R.,' accompanied by a date or by the royal crown, studded in brass or gilt headed nails, in the top transom.

During the seventeenth century we find that the decline in the general methods of construction sometimes led to the abandonment of panelling in the ends and backs of chests, plain flat boards being substituted for the framework of joinery filled with panels. This was but one way of saving a little trouble at the expense of niceness of construction. Some of the productions of even as early a time as the reign of James I. have excellently carved fronts, while the ends and back are merely a rough fitting of plain boards.

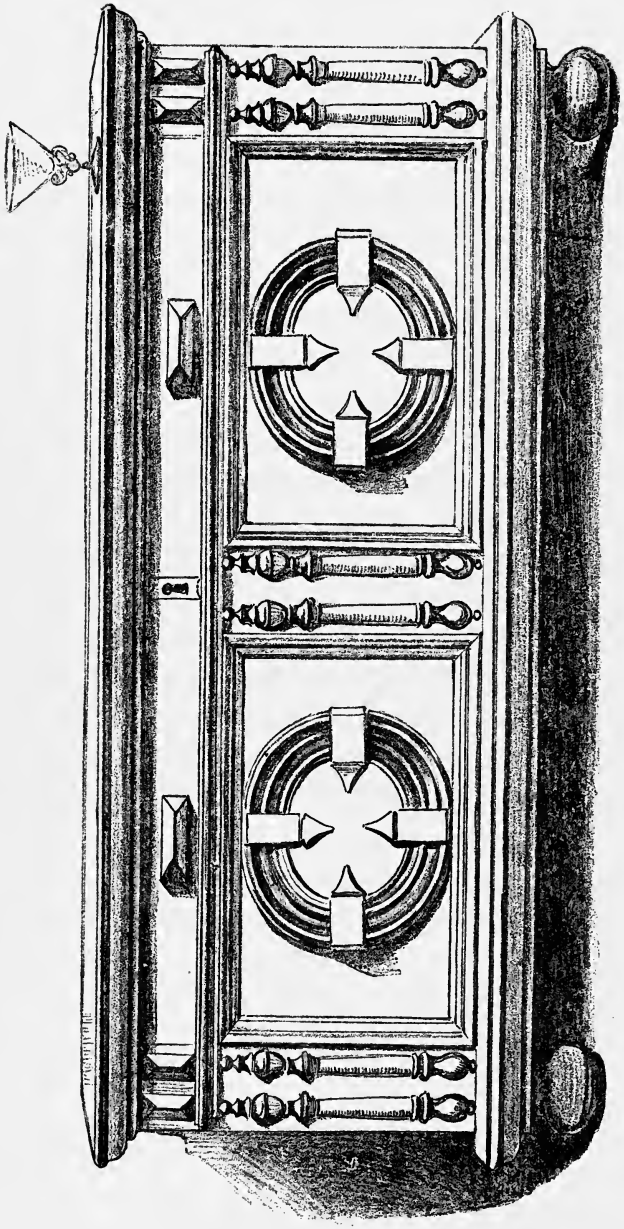
As the century advanced this method became increasingly common. Such chests as exhibit this debasement are scarcely ever of the same value as their more elaborately-constructed contemporaries.

Bible boxes of the seventeenth century are by no means uncommon, but, whether decorated or not, they almost, without exception, show a return to an early peculiarity. The front edge of the lid is brought flush, or nearly so, with the surface of the box, and does not project as at the sides. During the Cromwellian period, naturally, a great curtailment took place in the decoration of chests, many of them being of a very severe type, and showing a great lack of originality. Some good pieces, however, exhibiting simplicity of design and decoration, were produced.

In Waltham Abbey is a muniment chest, probably dating from the early years of Charles II.'s reign, which exhibits some decorative panelling and the initials 'E. W.,' which is an excellent and graceful specimen of its kind.

Reference has been made elsewhere to the custom, in medieval times, of using chests as seats. This practice still continued in later times. Richard Cromwell, who possessed a chest full of addresses of congratulation and protestations of fidelity from municipal corporations and influential families, often used to remark facetiously, after his retirement, when seated on his chest, that he was sitting on the lives and fortunes of most men in England.

The geometrical inlay on Elizabethan chests has




CHEST, TEMP. CHARLES II

already been mentioned. By the accession of Charles II. this form of inlay had entirely disappeared, though, curiously enough, the shape of the panels themselves assumed more or less complex geometrical outlines. The chest, too, by various additions, was rapidly revolving itself into the modern chest of drawers. Poorly-designed trimmings, sometimes in the shape of a series of connected bulbs, were literally stuck on, adding neither to the strength or beauty of the structure. The styles and transoms of chests during Charles II.'s reign were often grooved, after the manner of the Dutch Renaissance, though we occasionally find instances of this treatment of an earlier date. Such chests as were actually used for the purpose of containing valuables became the plain strong-boxes, such as we see in some of Sir Christopher Wren's City churches. For instance, there is an interesting old coffer with two padlocks in the Church of St. Magnus the Martyr, near London Bridge, bearing on its front nothing more than the incised legend:

'BRIDGE WARD
WITH IN
1674.'

This may be taken as a fair type of the muniment coffer placed in Metropolitan churches after the Great Fire of London. Remembering the glorious Gothic boxes at York, Faversham, Brancepeth, Wath, and many another place, one sighs over the degenerate taste of the Restoration. Before modern banking

methods were established such coffers as that at St. Magnus were used for safeguarding all manner of valuables, and were much in request by such well-to-do people as Samuel Pepys for the purpose of concealing (or perchance burying), in cases of emergency, their gold, their papers, their wine, or even their parmesan cheese in.

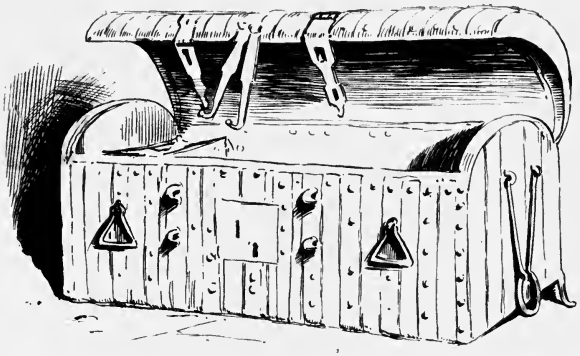
During the seventeenth century the lock-plate on all except the rougher sort of chests disappeared, its place being occupied by a small decorative escutcheon placed over the keyhole. Where the lock-plate was retained it was mostly quite flat, and presented no striking feature of interest.

Very rarely one comes across diminutive models of chests, complete in every detail, but measuring only some 8 or 10 inches in length. These are technically termed ''prentices' pieces,' and are supposed to be models constructed by apprentices to the 'coffering' industry who had learned their craft and were desirous of having a portable example of their skill to exhibit when in search of employment. Some beautiful little specimens of this kind may be seen in the Steen Castle Museum at Antwerp.

Although somewhat away from the subject of oak, the cypress or camphor chest should not be altogether overlooked. Boxes of this material were occasionally used during the seventeenth century for the preservation of fabrics which required safeguarding against the attacks of moths. In the 'Taming of the Shrew' Gremio mentions as having placed

'In cypress chests my arras, counterpoints,
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,
Valance of Venice gold in needlework;'

and so on. These boxes were mostly ornamented with poker work—that is, with designs burnt in on the surface with a hot iron, the royal coat-of-arms, accompanied by its supporters, being frequently depicted in this manner. The same form of decoration was largely employed throughout Italy at an earlier date, and the custom no doubt made its way hither from that country, but it does not seem to have been taken up very strongly by the English craftsmen.



TREASURE COFFER IN THE PYX CHAPEL, WESTMINSTER, SAID TO HAVE BELONGED TO EDWARD III

# CHAPTER IX

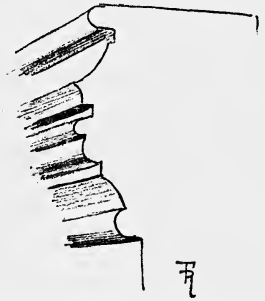
## CUPBOARDS AND SIDEBOARDS

THE name 'cupboard' is rather a wide term, embracing the armoire, or great press, the credence, the almery, the hutch, the court and livery cupboards, as well as many varieties of these leading forms. The various types mostly came into vogue during successive periods as developments of the primitive form, and in order to trace these developments it will be expedient to deal with each type consecutively, commencing with the earliest known type.

It is not in England that we must look for the oldest existing specimens of medieval cupboards. Such armoires as are to be seen at Aubazaine, in Correze, at Bayeux, and Noyon, no longer exist in our own country. Civil war, working its destruction over a small area, combined with the corroding nature of our climate, has in every instance reduced these early works of art to dust. There are, however, still remaining to us a very few examples of English armoires of the fifteenth century. The finest of these, which is in York Minster, is a huge embattled press of oak, containing many compartments of various shapes and

lengths. The cupboard on the right-hand side of this handsome structure reaches from the floor to its embattled cornice, and was evidently designed to contain a pastoral staff. The armoire is still equipped with its original iron locks and hinges, the latter being adorned with a series of rosettes wrought in the metal, and terminating in *fleurs-de-lis*.* The whole structure is probably the most complete English example of a Gothic cupboard in existence.

There are—or were until recently—two old Gothic cupboards in Carlisle Cathedral, though of much smaller dimensions than that at York. They had remains of a painted diaper pattern and wrought-iron hinges of fifteenth-century workmanship, while one of them bore the initials of Thomas Gondibour, who was Prior of the abbey toward the latter end of the fifteenth century.



SECTION OF MOULDING ON THE AYLESBURY ARMOIRE

In the parish church of Aylesbury, Bucks, is the remnant of an armoire of the fifteenth century, now used as a receptacle for the choristers' surplices. This most interesting fragment is formed of heavy baulks of oak pegged together in the usual manner, and has along the top a fine moulding of bold proportions. The front evidently at one time

* The handles and plates on the York armoire are of precisely the same character as many others which appear on the fittings in other parts of the cathedral.

possessed doors or shutters, for the marks of hinges are visible on the uprights.

The reason why the doors of so many receptacles of the pre-Reformation period have disappeared can be easily explained by a glance at some of the fifteenth-century foreign examples which still remain. It will be noticed that in the thirteenth-century armoire at Noyon the painted remains of figures of saints are visible on its shutters, while in other examples—such, for instance, as the upright Flemish cabinet belonging to Mr. Barry, of Ockwells Manor—the side-panels are elaborately carved, the front doors being now mere plain pieces of wood, which have evidently lost their original decoration of painted figures.

In England such representations as escaped the iconoclastic spirit of the Reformation were more summarily dealt with during the Cromwellian visitation, when hundreds of such 'Popish images and pictures' were destroyed out of hand by the zealous Puritans. The armoire, as its name implies, was a strong receptacle intended for the safe custody of articles of value. In the Middle Ages the two chief interests of life were the Church and the calling of a soldier. When used in an ecclesiastical capacity, the armoire was doubtless intended to contain plate and rich vestments, but when used for a military purpose it would no doubt constitute in itself an armoury containing the soldier's most valuable possession, his body armour. There is an old Dutch engraving of Charles I. in which the monarch's armour is depicted in a cup-

board beside him. We have, moreover, an earlier piece of evidence in the shape of a receipt from one Geoffrey Poulin for certain moneys paid to him for repairing, in 1419, the armoire of the Comte de Vertus and supplying the same with a new key for the better security of his armour.*

Though we have such a scarcity of early armoires in England to refer to as examples, an immense amount of information may be derived as to their form and decoration from studying the armoire-like cupboards beneath the magnificent oak Watch Gallery at St. Albans' Abbey. These cupboards have an embattled cornice like that of the York armoire, which also passes round the finely-moulded caps of the pillars supporting the gallery above, their shutters or doors being ornamented with applied Perpendicular tracery, and retaining most of their original iron fittings. The Watch Gallery is supposed to have been erected about the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century.

A remarkable instance of medieval furnishing occurs at Norwich, in the picturesque old-world building known as Strangers' Hall. The early history of this mansion is closely bound up with the history of the city itself. The present building, which is erected on the foundations of an earlier one, dates in great part from the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At that time it was inhabited by one Thomas

* Parker's ' Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages.' This document is in the British Museum (Add. Char., No. 2,806).

Cawse, a mercer, and Mayor of the city in 1495 and 1503, and also burgess in Parliament, 1489-1497, after whose death, in 1509, the property passed into the possession of the Sotherton family, who retained it for upwards of a century. During the occupation of the Sothertons an influx of foreigners engaged in the wool trade into the town took place, and some of these 'strangers artificers' took up their abode in the mansion, from which occupation the house derived its name.

After 1610, in which year the Sothertons sold the property, the old house passed through many vicissitudes, becoming so debased in the latter part of the nineteenth century as to be used as a common warehouse. From this degradation it was rescued, in 1899, by the public spirit and antiquarian zeal of Mr. Leonard G. Bolingbroke, a Norwich citizen, who, with the greatest taste and discrimination, has restored the mansion to something like its original state.

When the place was thus acquired, one piece of furniture remained which had followed the fortunes of the house for a period of about four centuries. This is a large oak armoire in one of the upper rooms, which is of such a size that there is no doubt whatever it was made, or at least joined together, in the house. It is a tall, heavy piece, in the Flemish style of the beginning of the sixteenth century, and is furnished with precisely similar handles and hinges to those which we find the Hanseatic League fitted on to so many presses and cupboards in the reign of

Henry VIII. Since the Continent was generally ahead of us in changes of style, the armoire may have been made during the latter years of the occupation of Thomas Cawse, who, as a mercer, would trade largely with the Flemings. It was, however, more probably constructed for one Nicholas Sotherton, the first tenant of the family of that name, whose initials and merchant's mark appear upon various alterations which he made in the building. Few such instances can be found in our own country of furniture remaining in the medieval building for which it was originally constructed; and this instance is the more remarkable in that the house has passed through many vicissitudes, and been denuded of all its other movable contents. The 'strong chest' at Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, the painted Newport coffer, and the Bayeux armoire, are striking exceptions to the rule of mutability, but it may be pointed out that these are all ecclesiastical pieces, while the example at Strangers' Hall is one made for a domestic residence.

How much we occasionally owe to indifference to antiquities is exemplified here in a very striking manner. Had the Strangers' Hall, instead of being neglected, been taken in hand some years earlier, it would no doubt have been restored in the abominable fashion prevailing in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the Flemish armoire, as well as other interesting details, altered or swept away as of no consequence.

The credence is a much more squat piece of furni-

ture than the armoire, and of considerably smaller size. In ecclesiastical establishments the name attached to this piece of furniture sufficiently indicates its purpose for displaying as well as containing the sacred vessels of the church. Domestic credences, however, hint at some darker meaning, for on them the meats were placed to be carved, and it was the duty of the steward, or taster, to eat a small portion of each joint before the lord of the house and his family were served, and thus to safeguard them against assassination by poison.* These credences were provided with a locker for the remains of food, and were sometimes built up at the back in the form of several stories, the superstructure being used for the flagons and cups for the wine, which had to be assayed in a like manner. In their expanded form they became known by the distinctive name of 'court cupboards.' The later and more usual types of this species of furniture will be dealt with later on.

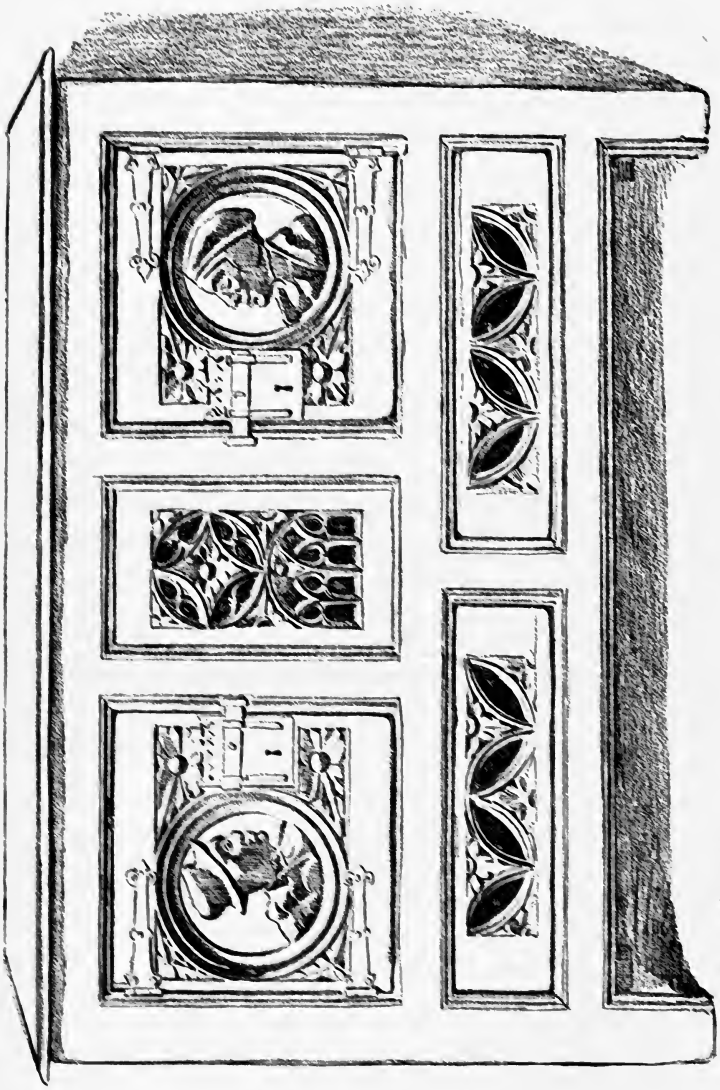
It is probable that no Gothic cupboard of English make with its original superstructure now remains to us, but some very elaborate productions of French and Flemish work in this category are still

* That the office mentioned continued in some instances down to a comparatively late period the following extract from Lord Fairfax's 'Household Regulations,' made about the middle of the seventeenth century, sufficiently testifies: 'Let no man fill beere or wine but the cupboard-keeper, who must make choice of his glasses or cups for the company, and not serve them hande over heade. He must also know which be for beere and which for wine; for it were a foul thing to mix them together.'

in existence.* At Ockwells Manor is an excellent specimen of the domestic credence, dating from the early part of the sixteenth century, and another example, dating from the reign of Henry VIII., is in the collection of Mr. Morgan Williams, of St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire. The latter possesses in its front a pierced panel of Gothic design, to admit air to the food within, and also two drawers underneath pierced with Gothic perforations—being, in fact, one of the earliest pieces of furniture with drawers that has come under my observation.

In the great hall at Haddon is the once-neglected remnant of a fine domestic credence dating from the early part of the sixteenth century. Its doors are embellished with the broad, flat, delicate mouldings usually associated with the Italian taste of the early Renaissance. At one time it must have possessed pendants after the Gothic fashion, though these have

* According to Parker, in the Court of Burgundy the number of shelves in a buffet, or cupboard, was regulated by the rank of the owner, but he says this significance does not appear to have prevailed in England. That, however, the splendour of a multiplication of stages or shelves was a fitting attribute of dignity we have plenty of indirect contemporary evidence. Stowe, the sixteenth-century chronicler, in his description of the festivities accompanying the wedding of Prince Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII., with Katherine of Arragon, notices a triangular cupboard, five stages high, at Westminster Hall, set with plate valued at £1,200. Hall, also writing in the sixteenth century, mentions a great cupboard of ten stages high standing in Westminster Hall at the coronation of Anne Boleyn, which was 'filled with gold plate most marvellous to behold.' The instances recorded of Cardinal Wolsey's magnificence in this particular direction are numerous.

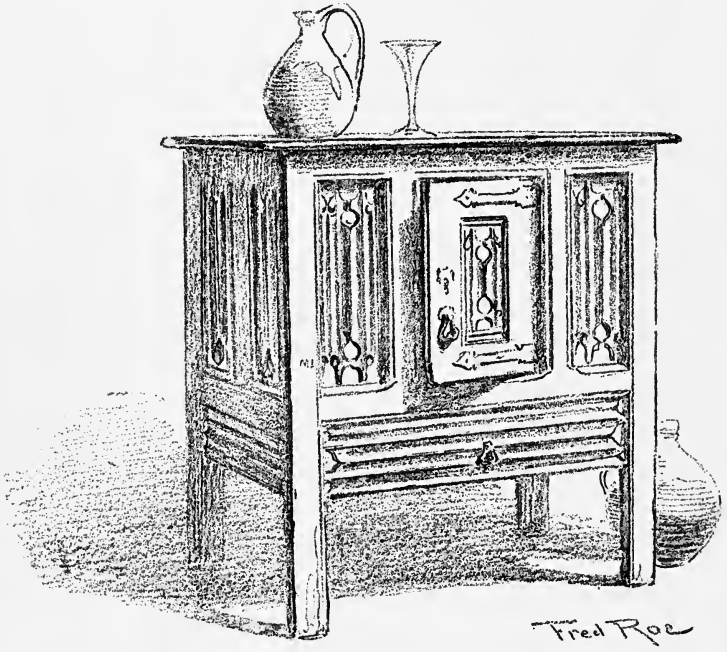


LATE GOTHIC CUPBOARD, PIERCED WITH TRACERY
In the possession of Morgan S. Williams, Esq.

now disappeared. Late fifteenth-century cupboards, which were probably used as credences, also exist in the churches of Louth, Lincolnshire, and Minehead, Somersetshire, the former being given by the Vicar, Thomas Sudbury (1461-1504), and the other being a fine piece of flamboyant design, which suggests the work of a foreigner residing in England. The Minehead cupboard, like Mr. Williams' piece, possesses drawers, but its original iron fittings have disappeared. It sometimes happens that the decoration of credences or hutches is not confined to the front and sides, the back also being carved with a beauty and care which suggest that the piece was intended to stand in the centre of a room.

The Minehead cupboard belongs to this category. The doors, centre panel, and drawers in its front exhibit some elaborate tracery and the initials 'J. M. C.,' while the back shows panels carved with the emblems of the Passion, traceried windows, and two shields, which display the arms of England and France quarterly, and a dolphin between three mullets. There is considerable difficulty in identifying the origin of this cupboard, for though the tracery, as well as a lily pot which appears on one door, hints at the work of a Flemish, or more probably a French, craftsman, the shape and make of the piece are undeniably English, and this is confirmed by the presence of our royal arms. The dolphin, too, is not the device of the Dauphin of France, as that Prince's heraldic fish is differently disposed, and is not accompanied by any

mullets. Considering the peculiarities of construction and decoration, there is every reason to believe *that the piece was built in England at the workshop of a master-craftsman, while the decorative panels were carved by a foreign workman in his employ.*




LINEN-PANELLED CREDENCE

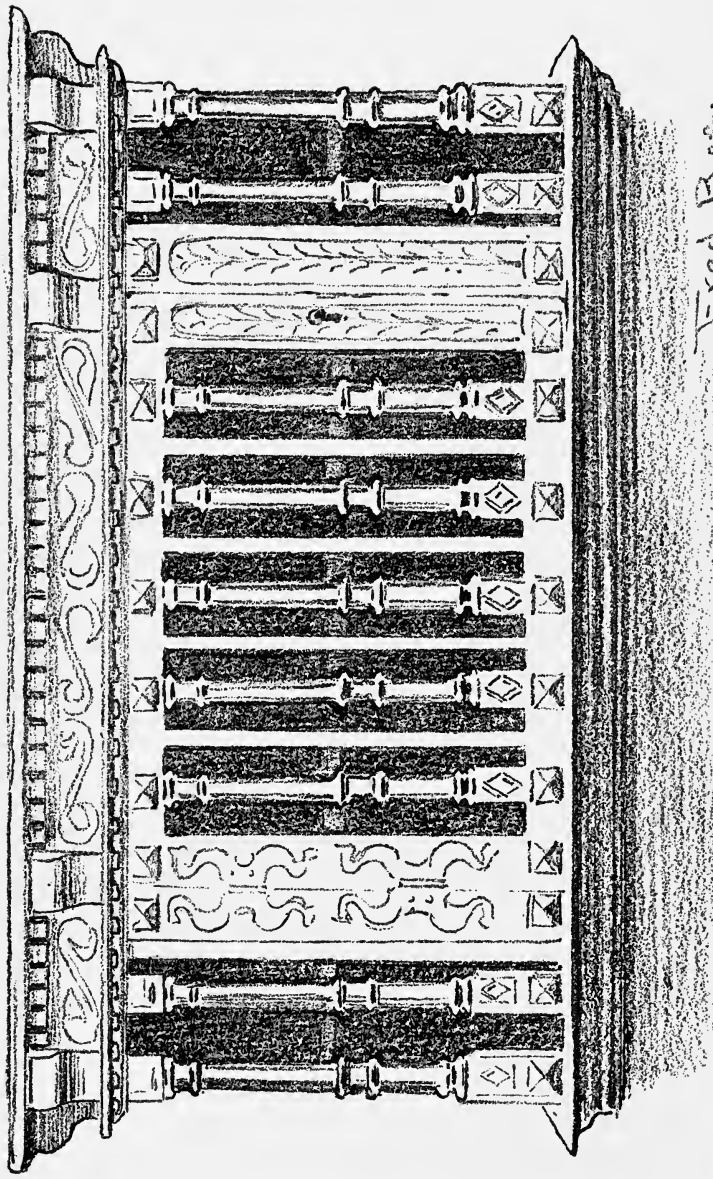
In the possession of Guy F. Laking, Esq., M.V.O.

Mr. Guy F. Laking, M.V.O., the Keeper of the King's Armoury, possesses another of these central cupboards, a small English piece of good proportions, elevated on tall legs and decorated with linen panels inserted in all its four sides. It is not uncommon to find that these credences have tops made

from a lighter wood than the body of the structure, but through want of knowledge on the part of the owners such tops have been sometimes condemned and replaced by fresh ones of oak. The known indifference of early craftsmen to interpolations of different material ought to prevent such vandalism as this. The top of the credence, as devoted to its original use, would be concealed by a linen cloth or other napery, and its construction of uniform material would be of little consequence.

In the case of one fine credence, which was discovered during recent years in a Suffolk cottage, the replacement of the original top by a conformable one of oak was strongly advocated by an over-zealous restorer to whom the piece was entrusted for renovation. It may be mentioned that the original top, of elm, was of fine colour, and scored with marks for playing the old game of 'shuffle,' or shovel-board, but these features had little attraction for the restorer, who wished to make a 'job' of the piece, and, in his eyes, render it complete; but, fortunately, his proposal was not assented to.

Food lockers of a type quite dissimilar from the credence were also in use during the Middle Ages. In nearly every case these may be known by the perforations, mostly in the shape of Gothic windows, which were introduced in their doors and sides. These perforations were generally backed with red cloth, which, while it excluded dust, admitted air. Traces of this cloth and its attachments may still be found on



SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ALMERY (ONE OF THREE) IN ST. ALBANS' ABBEY CHURCH, HERTS

the inner side of these old Gothic food lockers. A maker of such cupboards lived in late Gothic times in the county of Sussex, and his productions, which are evidently all by the same hand, in some cases are absolutely identical in their decoration. One of these lockers is in the possession of Mr. Morgan Williams, of St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire, to whose collection we have had occasion to refer several times, and who has been successful, I believe, in securing no less than four specimens of this maker's work. The tracery with which the wood is pierced is so late in character that it is rather difficult to assign a date to these pieces, but the probability is that they were made about the time of Henry VIII.

The almery, or dole cupboard, is usually a receptacle with a railed, open front, which, as its name indicates, was designed to contain gifts of bread and other necessaries distributed to the poor. Many of these are used at the present day, and probably the fact of their having been in constant use has contributed to their preservation. In a Norman recess in the south transept of St. Albans' Abbey Church stand three picturesque old almeries in which temporarily is deposited the bread which on each Sunday is distributed to the poor of the city.* They are quaint shallow little receptacles, each capable of holding about a dozen small loaves. Their fronts are fitted with delicate rails through which comes the appetizing

* The custom is said to have been kept up at St. Albans for three hundred years.

odour of newly-baked bread. The most elaborate, which may date from the reign of Charles I., is carved with strap ornaments and further embellished with brackets. The hinges are of the 'cock's-head' pattern, so called from their bearing a fanciful resemblance to a crowing cock. The door of this almery, as may be seen in the illustration, has been additionally strengthened by inter-railing, probably during Georgian times—a very expressive testimony to the easy honesty which may exist even where church doles of dry bread are concerned. The other two plainer almeries are of later make, dating from the time of Charles II., to whose reign the greater part of the railed examples remaining may be attributed. A finer specimen than either of the St. Albans almeries exists in the Calverley Hotel at Tunbridge Wells. The lower part of this piece is enclosed with small unpierced doors, beautifully inlaid with intricate geometrical patterns in lighter woods. At that wonderfully picturesque old establishment, Christ's Hospital, at Abingdon, Berkshire, is an almery which combines the functions of a dole-cupboard and a table. This is a truly magnificent piece of furniture, possessing bulb-legs surmounted by pillar-caps similar in outline to the Dinton and Kensington examples described in the chapter on tables. It is really part of the furniture designed for the hospital in its early years, but that institution was founded in 1553, and the almery-table, which is typically Elizabethan in character, can scarcely be of quite so early a date as the foundation. An almery of

quite a different description exists in the Parish Church at Coity, Glamorganshire, where it has probably fulfilled the purpose of an Easter sepulchre in bygone days. It possesses a coped and crocketed lid profusely decorated with flowing tracery, while the front panels are carved with the various emblems of the Passion in medallions, the corners of which are fitted with Gothic spandrels. In spite of its superficially early appearance, this piece probably does not belong to a date prior to Henry VIII.'s reign.

In the time of Henry VIII. a large substantial press was used which partook very much of the nature of the armoire, and was, in fact, a stage in the development of that species of furniture into the court cupboard, a domestic equipment which continued in vogue for some 200 years.* The type associated with Henry VIII.'s reign is flat in outline, having two large doors which close the greater portion of the structure, while above these the space is divided into two or three compartments furnished with small square doors. The frame panels to all the doors are usually carved with portrait heads enclosed in medallions, and are further decorated with arabesques in the style of the Renaissance. Such mouldings as these cupboards possess often partake of a Gothic character, showing that the older style had not entirely died out. A very

* The De Vere cupboard at Castle Hedingham, described in Chapter XVI., is a good specimen of this type, semi-Gothic in character and flat in outline. It probably dates from about the junction of the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII.

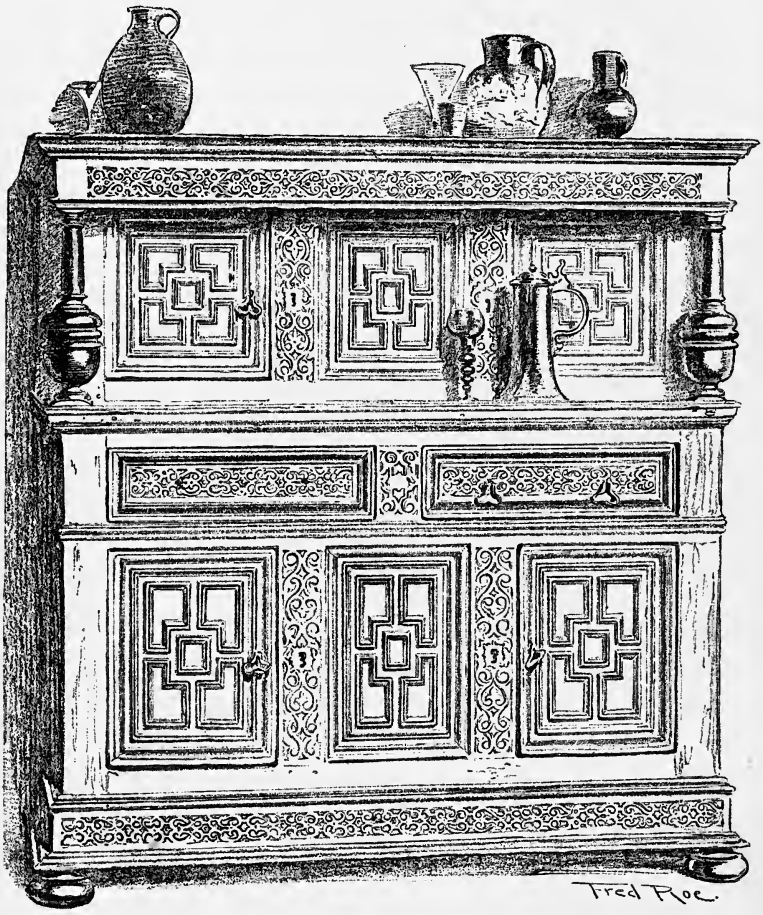
fine specimen of this description, having its top story further decorated with pilasters, and with its original ironwork intact, was discovered in a cottage near Watford some few years ago, and is now in the collection of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge. It sometimes happens that in specimens of this class the heads on the smaller top doors project considerably in relief, having the appearance of thrusting themselves out from the surface of the panel. If such pieces as bear this peculiarity are closely examined, it will be found that the wood from which the projecting heads are formed has been applied in the block and afterwards carved. When the old residence, No. 7, Delahay Street, Westminster, commonly known as Judge Jeffreys' House, was demolished in 1892, some panels of the latter description, which had evidently formed part of a cupboard, were brought under notice. The heads in this case wore the peculiar flat cap with cheek-pieces which was so characteristic of Holbein's portraits. A very good example of this application of the material for the purpose of carving the mask on can be seen in the central head on the overmantel of the oak room (2,011, 1899), in the Victoria and Albert Museum. We shall have occasion to refer again to this interesting room in the chapter on panelling.

There is a curious cupboard, exhibiting decorative mouldings of the style in vogue during Henry VIII.'s reign, at Chetham's College, Manchester, which is at first sight puzzling to those who do not know its history. The piece in question, a large press of oak,

with paned posts at the corners, was originally a four-post bedstead, made about the middle of the sixteenth century for one Adam Hulton, whose initials appear upon it. The accompanying date of 1655 was added at the instance of the celebrated merchant, Humphrey Chetham, who at that time presented the relic to the college to accompany his endowment for the purchase of 'godly books.' It is said that this bedstead was slept in by Prince Charles Edward during his mad descent on Lancashire in 'the 45.' The transformation of the bedstead into a cupboard has been effected since the Pretender's Rebellion, but at what date we do not precisely know. At the present it remains one of those strange, nondescript pieces of furniture which result from a good article being spoiled.

During Elizabeth's reign a modification was introduced into the flat, upright cupboard of her father's reign, which then became what is generally known as the court cupboard. The upper story of the piece was recessed, having a ledge on which articles could be placed in front of the small doors when closed. The canopy which overhung the doors was supported at each end by detached balusters, which frequently took the form of jewelled bulbs. Inside the moulded canopy was usually a small space, which, though it can hardly be described as a hiding-place, being a feature of such common occurrence, was nevertheless in some measure a place of concealment for small articles. In some pieces of this kind the large cupboard underneath is dispensed with and the space left open, so that any

articles placed on the base would be exposed to view. The upper tier of lockers would in this case be sup-




COURT CUPBOARD, COMMENCEMENT OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

ported by large balusters of a similar character to those immediately above. Occasionally instances are found where the top story possesses but one compartment,

having the door in the centre and the sides receding diagonally to the back.

Mr. Ernest Crofts, R.A., to whose ancestral furniture we have already referred, owns no fewer than three exquisite specimens of this type of cupboard, the very finest productions of their kind. The melon-shaped baluster and black and white inlay are common features of these fine pieces of furniture. One of them, moreover, possesses on its drawer that graceful reminiscence of Gothic art the running grape-vine. Another richly carved and inlaid cupboard belonging to the same owner is especially worthy of remark. It is a low credence-shaped cupboard decorated with caryatides, and bearing the inlaid date of 1626. The curious thing about this cupboard is that, while its details are in the style of the early seventeenth century, the form and construction of the piece are late Gothic in character, and call to mind the Louth and Minehead hutches.

An exquisite example of the cupboard with faceted sides, but in the last stage of worm and decay, may perhaps still be seen in the gate-house at Rye House. Two excellent specimens of the varieties of Elizabethan court cupboards just mentioned exist in the Calverley Hotel at Tunbridge Wells, the earliest being a superb specimen of the finest type, with capped and jewelled balusters, the stiles beneath the canopy having carved trusses, and the doors being inlaid with geometrical ornaments. The architectural mouldings on the large under doors are specially remarkable. The second of

the pieces is a dwarf court cupboard with faceted sides, the canopy being supported with heavy balusters and the doors decorated with arches. A third cupboard is of later date and of more usual type, while the almery at this hotel has already been described. All the pieces possess their original drop-handles. It is curious to find such a 'corner' of old oak at this very classic-looking hotel, but it may be remarked that pieces such as these are not unfrequently found in the most unpromising places. No record has been preserved as to how they came to their present abode, though it is known that they have been in the house ever since it was inhabited by the Duchess of Kent as a private residence.

It is not to be supposed, however, that the flat-fronted oak press was discontinued when the court cupboard came into vogue. It still survived for the keeping of vestments in church vestries and collegiate institutions. The Leicester Hospital at Warwick contains in its quaint kitchen a huge square press elevated on squat legs, which is traditionally said to have come from Kenilworth Castle. This legend may be true, though other oral revelations respecting old furniture in the Leicester Hospital may be more doubtful.* At the Castle Rising Bede-houses, to which reference has already been made in the chapter on chairs, the quaint old costume of the inmates is kept in a flat-fronted oak press which has existed in the dining-hall since the foundation of the institution in 1615. The

* See account of the so-called 'Saxon' chair in Chapter II.

press has oblong top panels, carved with a classic design, and cock's-head hinges.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some of the buffets continued to adhere, in certain respects, to the old Gothic method of construction, inasmuch as they still retained the upper story of shelves, built up above the table of the structure for the reception of cups and tankards. A dilapidated example of this kind, dating from the first half of the seventeenth century, which remains at Rye House, has the upper shelf supported by a series of little pillars, the cupboard underneath having two doors with a deeply-recessed panel between them. In Wales this upper shelf was retained until a very late period, and cupboards of the late oak period may generally be safely assumed to have come from the Principality or its borderland, where they still go by the name of 'tredarns.' Such pieces, instead of the supporting balusters, usually have a turned pendant at either end of the overhanging canopy. There are so many varieties of the court cupboard of Elizabethan and later times that to give a detailed description of all the peculiarities which the type exhibits would be tedious. It may be mentioned, however, that the earlier classic specimens—that is to say, those of Elizabeth's time and of the first years of James I.'s reign—are characterized mainly by the enormous size of the jewelled bulbs which adorn the pillars supporting the canopy, by the excellence and beauty of both their strap and jewel mouldings, and by the small size of the panels compared with the mouldings with which they are framed.

So excessively deep are some of the latter that the panel itself may be said to be actually recessed between the stiles. Elizabethan court cupboards decorated with caryatides are rarely met with, while this feature is hardly ever found in subsequent reigns.

As the seventeenth century wore on a singular fact may be noticed in connection with the court cupboard. While the carved details and ornamentation generally became debased, the outline frequently maintained an architectural simplicity which is very pleasing. A specimen of fine work of this sort is in the possession of Dr. Kingdon, of King's Lynn, which, though late in character, shows what could be accomplished by relying simply on outline and form, without recourse to surface-carving. The piece in question is a court cupboard of very black oak, and in a fine state of preservation, with pillar balusters supporting the canopy and geometrically-outlined panels. Its purity of style, combined with the lateness of character, is really remarkable.

During the second half of the seventeenth century the little iron drop-handles, which formed such a graceful accompaniment to articles made during the early Renaissance, began to be abandoned in favour of small wooden knobs, which finally developed into the substantial handles identified with the late mahogany period. The use of the cocks'-head hinge was also forsaken, cupboard doors, turning on plain hinges concealed from the front, or merely on vertical pins.

The transition of the court cupboard into what is now known as the chest of drawers might be traced

without difficulty. The chest of drawers in its present form was unknown before the middle of the seventeenth century, and there is little doubt that the custom of incorporating drawers with the court cupboard was the beginning of the abandonment of the canopied recess, which eventually led to the adoption of the later form. But though the canopy ceased to be in vogue about the third quarter of the seventeenth century, many of the chests of drawers which were then made still retained the cupboard underneath which was part of the older form. In fact, although the canopy was shed, the cupboard remained yet awhile.

The reign of Charles II. was prolific in the manufacture of such pieces, and many of them are highly decorated, being inlaid with ivory, ebony, and mother-of-pearl. The introduction of the date of their manufacture on an ivory plate also became a feature of these pieces, dates ranging from 1659 to 1670 being of usual occurrence.

It must be observed, however, that the inlay, in quality, is mostly very far below that which adorned earlier productions, exhibiting both coarseness of design and workmanship. Apart from the inlay, the decoration of these sideboards—for so they may be termed—consists of perspective views, and ebonized roundels and jewel ornaments applied to the surface of the wood.* In fact, there is a general decadence in artistic form and workmanship.

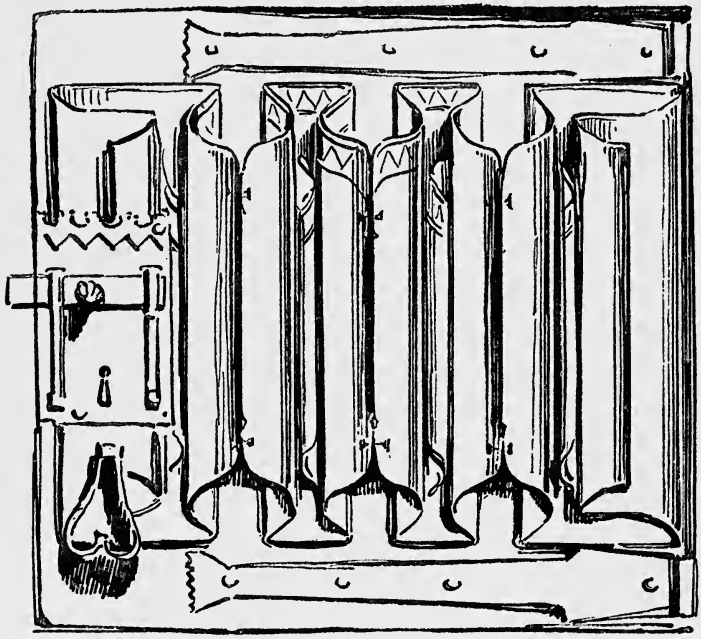
* The return to the roundel after the lapse of more than a century is worthy of remark. This feature in its later form was, however, applied, instead of being an integral part of the panel.

There is a very general but mistaken notion that the pieces just mentioned originally came from Holland, and many people who possess some knowledge of old oak do not hesitate to pronounce them Dutch. The very reverse of this, however, is the truth. The Dutch character, which is so observable in them, is simply an echo of the tastes which Charles II. acquired during his exile, a good portion of which was spent in the Low Countries. It is sometimes puzzling, as we have noticed before, to find work of two totally distinct types carried on in a country at one and the same time.

Side by side with these inlaid pieces, wearing their Dutch characteristics, we find imitations, sometimes very coarse, however, of the early seventeenth-century style bearing precisely the same date, but this is only the old tale of the previous style fighting a slow but losing battle against modern innovation. It is not to be supposed that these sideboards are the only pieces of furniture of the time which exhibited these apparently foreign characteristics of form and inlay. Chests and even medicine cupboards are to be found of a very similar type, but it is mainly the sideboards that are identified with this particular introduction of a foreign element in design. Articles of this type—at least, such as were intended to be placed upon the ground—were elevated upon circular feet placed slightly beyond the centre of the stile, and now known from their flattened shape as onion balls.

During the reigns which closely succeeded the

Commonwealth the use of the chest of drawers became extended, and in that form the piece began to be a recognised thing. The fronts of the drawers are generally panelled in geometrical forms, the edge mouldings sometimes containing an immense number of mitres. In one piece of this description, which the writer heard was purchased at Winchester, the mouldings on the fronts of the drawers exhibited considerably over a century and a half of mitres. With the closing of the seventeenth century all that is interesting regarding cupboards of the 'oak period' vanishes.



LINEN-PANEL DOOR IN CUPBOARD COLLECTION OF E. A. BARRY, ESQ.

## CHAPTER X

### VARIETIES OF THE CUPBOARD: DRESSERS, DESKS

IN old inventories and specifications we find the term 'livery cupboard' frequently employed. This name has in our own day lost all significance, and it is difficult to determine how the name came to be used, or, indeed, to what particular class of article it was applied. It is not always easy to determine the exact nature of pieces of furniture referred to in old writings, owing to the habit prevalent with writers of giving the generic only instead of the specific name, though the latter would be perfectly well known to them. Thus one finds them speaking of 'cupboard' only instead of 'court cupboard,' 'livery cupboard,' or 'credence.' On the other hand, the true character of a piece may sometimes be ascertained from the author's description of its features, although it is not defined in name.

According to Parker, livery cupboards were pieces of furniture which did not possess 'the little ambries of safes,' and, 'instead of being used like the court cupboard or buffet for the display of plate, were for placing the dishes upon as they were brought into the hall.' He cites the contract for building Hengrave Hall,

Suffolk, which is a classic authority, and in which it is stated: 'Ye cobards they be made ye facyon of lieuery yt is wtoute doors.' If this correctly describes the livery cupboard, it was probably merely a species of sideboard having an intermediate shelf resting on carved supports and acting as a dumb waiter for the disposal of the dishes and plates. A fine Elizabethan piece answering to this description is in the great hall of Christchurch College, Oxford.

Another much-used article of furniture in old times was the 'dressor,' or dresser, as it is now termed—a type which approximates somewhat to the credence. These 'dressors' in the Middle Ages were fitted with little shutters or doors like the credence, and also possessed a superstructure of several shelves, but the difference between them and their prototype is that the table surmounting the cupboards is of too high an elevation for the purpose of carving meats upon, and the whole structure is lighter in design and workmanship. The superstructure referred to is actually but a surviving feature of the old storied court cupboard. In making these latter remarks about English-made articles, I must confess that one is relying on somewhat meagre sources. English dressers of the Perpendicular and early Renaissance periods bearing the superstructure referred to are practically non existent in our own country, though I have heard that some specimens are to be seen in the museum at Copenhagen amidst the glorious collection of antiques gathered there.

Of French and Flemish contemporary examples a

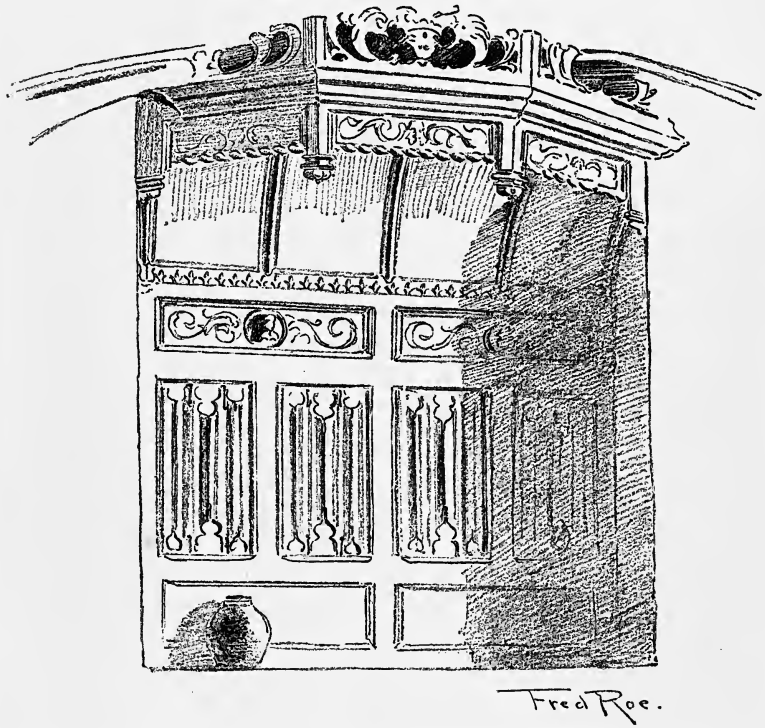
good many still remain, and these, together with such MS. illustrations as we possess, form the basis of our knowledge of those wonderful pinnacled 'dressors,' so richly suggestive of ideas of old Court life, which the antiquary and collector now sigh for in vain.

The collection left by the late Sir Richard Wallace to the nation contains a superb three-storied 'dressoir' of walnut in the French flamboyant style of the fifteenth century, and the Louvre and Cluny collections in Paris afford equally wonderful examples, which may be studied with advantage.

A magnificent and almost unique specimen of a dresser remains in the solar chamber in the Neptune Inn, Fore Street, Ipswich, but it is a fixture embedded within the wall, and hence belongs more properly to the province of fitted furniture.

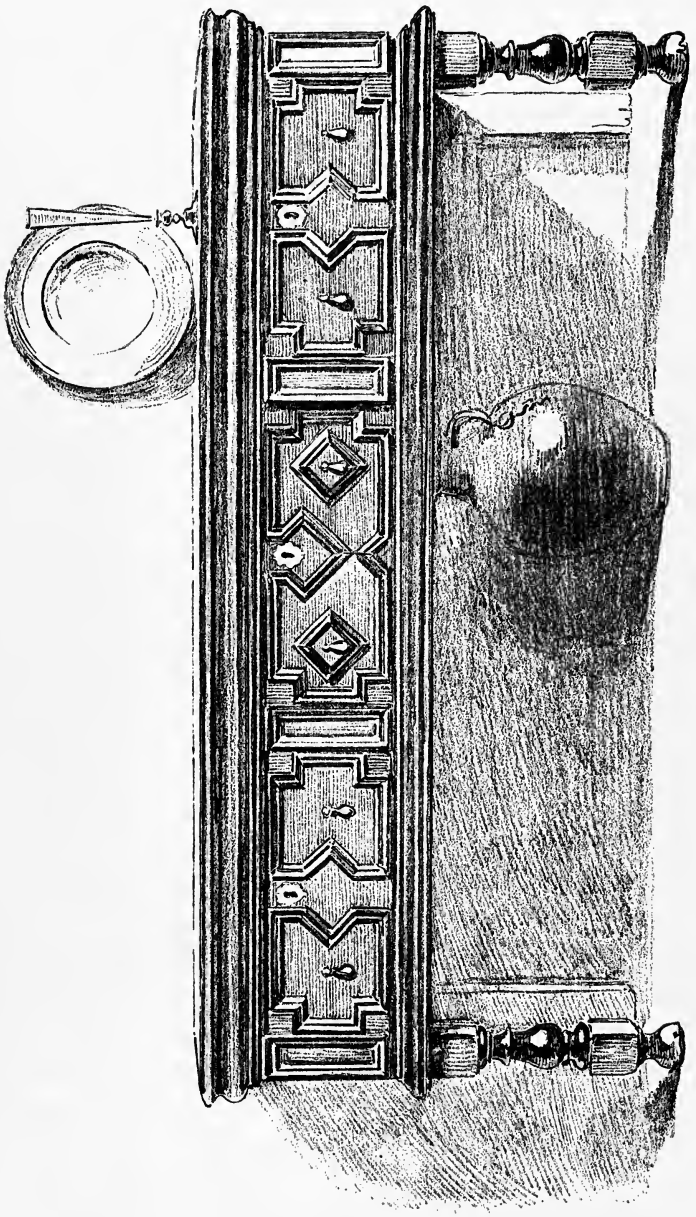
The dressers of the Middle Ages are distinctly different, both in construction and outline, from the dressers of the later period; and, indeed, it is noteworthy that there is a break in the continuity of this species of furniture. It appears, during the time of Elizabeth, to have become merged into the buffet, or sideboard, and not to have reappeared—in its distinct character, at any rate—before the reign of Charles I., when its features were totally changed. The seventeenth-century buffet at Rye House, with its upper shelf supported by little pillars, which was mentioned in the last chapter, is the nearest approach to a connection between the two types which can be mentioned. The type with which the name is generally associated

seems to have sprung into existence during the second half of the seventeenth century, and presents details, both of construction and moulding, which can hardly be assigned, at the earliest, to a period prior to the




FIXED DRESSER OR SIDEBOARD IN THE NEPTUNE INN, IPSWICH, TEMP. HENRY VIII

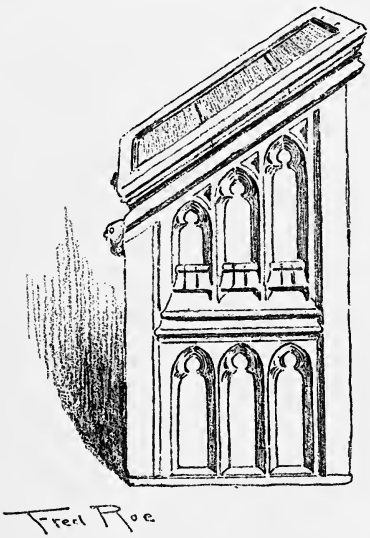
reign of Charles II. This revival in outline is very similar to the kitchen dresser of the present day, differing chiefly in the fact that it is a movable piece and not a fixture, and that it is a much more elaborate article of furniture, intended for the living-room, and




DRESSER, SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

not for use in the domestic offices. The dresser in this form is a table-like structure, measuring some 6 feet, more or less, in length, furnished with drawers and supported on turned legs. The drawers are frequently panelled in geometrical outlines and fitted with drop-handles. Possessing a tall upright back, which would be placed against the wall, this dresser would be provided with shelves, something after the manner of the earlier examples, for the purpose of carrying plates, hooks also being inserted in the outer edge of the shelves to hang mugs and cannikins upon, and the dresser, so decked out with its household accompaniments, must have presented a picture of homely comfort in the middle-class dwelling of the time. Of the dressers of the later variety which have survived, a great many will be found without the superstructure; but, though not invariably the case, an examination will often show that the back and shelves were once there, but have been removed. The weakness of construction has no doubt mainly contributed to the loss of the back. During the reign of William III. or Queen Anne the superstructure is elaborated by the addition of little cupboards, sometimes decorated by the addition of inlay; but at this time the oak period was fast merging into the mahogany, of which material dressers, as well as other articles of furniture, commenced to be made. An interesting specimen of dressers of the end of the oak period, with its high-shelved back furnished with pewter, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Nos. 503 to 506, 1898).

Desks doubtless had their origin in the old monkish establishments, since in the early Middle Ages the cowled brethren were the scribes of the community. In England similarly, in the case of chairs, we have the book-rests and reading-desks attached to the choir-fittings of our cathedrals and minsters, but apart from these instances there is a lamentable lack of home-made desks of the earlier periods. The wealth of Gothic desks such as we see in missal paintings, or, to come to a modern authority, occasionally in the book-illustrations of that wonderful artist and antiquary De Neuville, have hardly a counterpart in this country. The superb series of black and white illustrations to Guizot's 'History of France,' which were the work of the artist just mentioned, should be studied by every one interested in historic fittings and furniture, for they are all founded on fact, assisted by De Neuville's extensive and minute knowledge of his subject. At the Victoria and Albert Museum, however, is an English writing-desk of the fifteenth century, carved with Perpendicular arches,




DESK CARVED WITH PERPENDICULAR TRACERY

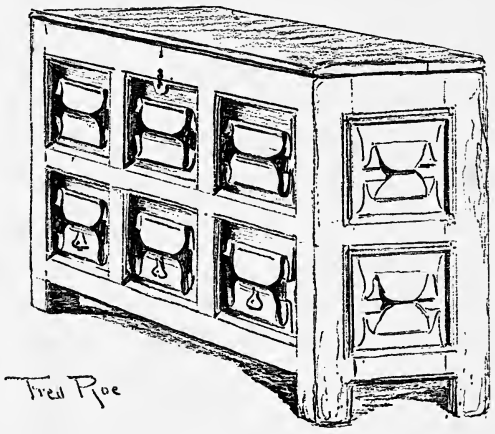
In the Victoria and Albert Museum, fifteenth century

simple in design, and solid in construction (No. 143, 1898).

The essential shape of the desk is so obvious that, apart from the decoration, there is little to call for description. During the Elizabethan period desks appear to have been made without a substructure, so as merely to be placed upon a table when required for use, but about the middle of the sixteenth century we find that they were placed upon stands having turned legs connected by rails. Nevertheless, it is rare to find such pieces intact, for the desk and the stand were detachable, not being made in one piece. Hence it follows that many Goths and Vandals who possessed such desks, and were desirous of multiplying their articles of furniture, converted each part to a separate use, turning the stand into a table through the simple addition of a flat top. Desks of the seventeenth century were often provided with secret drawers, several instances of which are quoted in the chapter on 'Furniture with Hiding-places.'

Of medicine cupboards or 'spice chests' there is little to say. They were small upright receptacles intended for hanging against the wall, having a single door opening cupboardwise, and partly fitted with a series of small drawers for the purpose of containing herbs, simples, and other remedies of the day. These 'chests' were often carved on the front with some simple pattern, and occasionally, after the middle of the century was passed, decorated with mother-of-pearl and ivory inlay, similar to the sideboards in the

Dutch style described in the last chapter. One of the earliest dated specimens of this form of decoration which the writer has seen was on a medicine cupboard dated 1654. This, curiously enough, is a date some years in advance of the actual time when the Dutch fashion was set by Charles II. in England after his wanderings in the Low Countries. In all such movements as this change in taste there are little beginnings which usually pass almost unnoticed, but which, nevertheless, herald the approaching fashion.




INGLE-NOOK SEAT WITH BOX TOP AND DRAWERS, FRENCH OR FLEMISH, ABOUT 1500

# CHAPTER XI

## SETTLES AND BENCHES

ONE of the most homely and useful pieces of furniture that has ever been invented is the old-fashioned settle, and it is difficult to understand why its use has declined in modern life. We have very few settles earlier than the Elizabethan period remaining in England, but that they were extensively used during the Middle Ages we know, and, indeed, in common with coffers and chests, the settle formed one of the few staple pieces of furniture which existed in almost every house above the rank of the labourer's cottage. This can be readily understood when we consider the ill-fitting doors and shutters which were provided to even such palatial mansions as Haddon Hall, where, by the way, they may be seen in all their primitive crudeness.

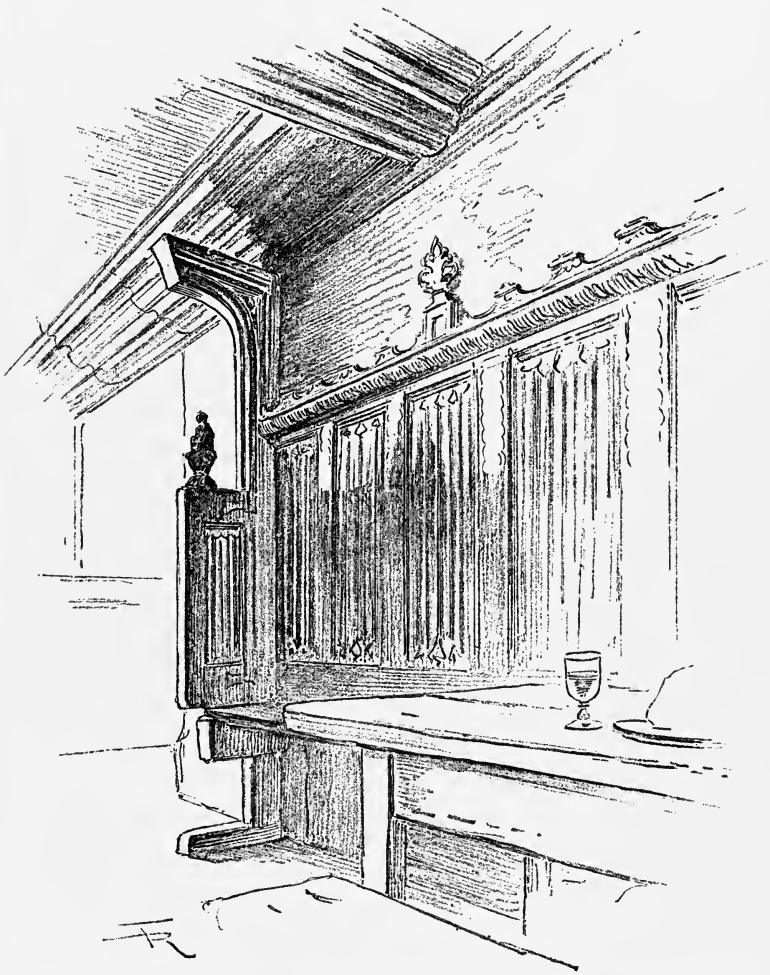
Improvements in the joinery and construction of domestic dwellings, perhaps, contributed to the partial abandonment of the settle, which would lose a good deal of its purpose in a room in which there were no draughts. At all events, the degeneration of the settle commenced simultaneously with the freer intro-

duction of the sash window. Still, flanking the fire on a chill autumn or winter night, there is no other piece of furniture ever invented which so admirably contributes to comfort.

Which of us wanderers in search of the picturesque cannot call to mind some evening spent snugly ensconced in its sheltering corner by the open hearth of the village inn? Fortunately, even in these days of modern innovation, many inns throughout the country still retain their ancient settles, some of them almost encircling the room, as at the Green Dragon, Wymondham, or the White Hart, Bletchingley, and I for one should be more than sorry to hear any suggestion of their being replaced by 'up-to-date' furniture.

Probably one of the oldest settles existing in England is that which remains in the south ambulatory of the choir of Winchester Cathedral. This is a very massive and rough monks' bench, the back formed of huge upright planks of oak mortised or tongued together. It is undoubtedly very ancient, but unfortunately there is absolutely no decoration whatever to afford a clue to its date. Tradition goes in the neighbourhood that it dates from Saxon times, but this, like many other ecclesiastical legends, must be taken *cum grano salis.*

Infinitely more interesting is an inn settle in the little village of Combe St. Nicholas, in Somersetshire. This is an excellent type of the 'long settle' in use during late Gothic times, and, further, there is no doubt whatever as to its approximate date. It is a huge



FIXED LINEN-PANELLED SETTLE IN THE GREEN DRAGON INN, COMBE ST. NICHOLAS, SOMERSET

piece of furniture, its back decorated with simple linen panels, and surmounted by a cornice carved with a double ribbon pattern. Near the door is a draught-stop, and above the latter a massive limb juts out somewhat after the manner of a 'hammer-beam,' such as we see in open-timber church roofs. This beam terminates in the figure of an angel (as is usual with hammer-beams), bearing in its grasp a shield, on which appears the device of a goat's head, and immediately beneath this singular projection, and surmounting the draught-stop, is a diminutive, carved figure, seated on something that resembles a wheatsheaf. These two figures, from their singular position, were known to the rustics who assembled here as 'the parson and the clerk.' I say 'were known,' for 'the parson' has now disappeared from his elevation, and gone to grace the collection of curios of some local Oldbuck.

It appears, from the position of this hammer-beam, that it originally formed part of the support of the roof itself, which may have been, and most probably was, of the open timber character, commonly constructed in late Plantagenet and Tudor times. This instance of utilizing the principal piece of furniture as a part of the room itself is remarkable, and as regards domestic dwellings, perhaps unique. The Combe St. Nicholas settle should be compared with the dresser at the Neptune Inn, Ipswich, both being characteristic specimens of fixed furniture made at a fairly contemporary date, and of exceeding rarity.

Settles of an age earlier than late Elizabethan or Jacobean times are so rare that, except for a very few instances in this country, we can only seek for them successfully in MS. illustrations. There used to be a solitary specimen of late Gothic construction in the porch of one of the prebendal houses at Lincoln, but it was weathered and in bad condition when I saw it, having apparently stood out in the open for many years.

Plain, small, and low-backed, this belated waif from the monastery, though perfectly 'true,' was insignificant compared to the elaborate and imposing structures which we come across in MS. illustrations. In the well-known picture of the money-changer in the 'Mirrour of the World' (MS. Bodleian, 283), the settle on which the usurer is seated has a handsome turreted and panelled back, one end of the seat being flanked by a larger wing than the other—a species of variation which was customary with the medieval designer and draughtsman.

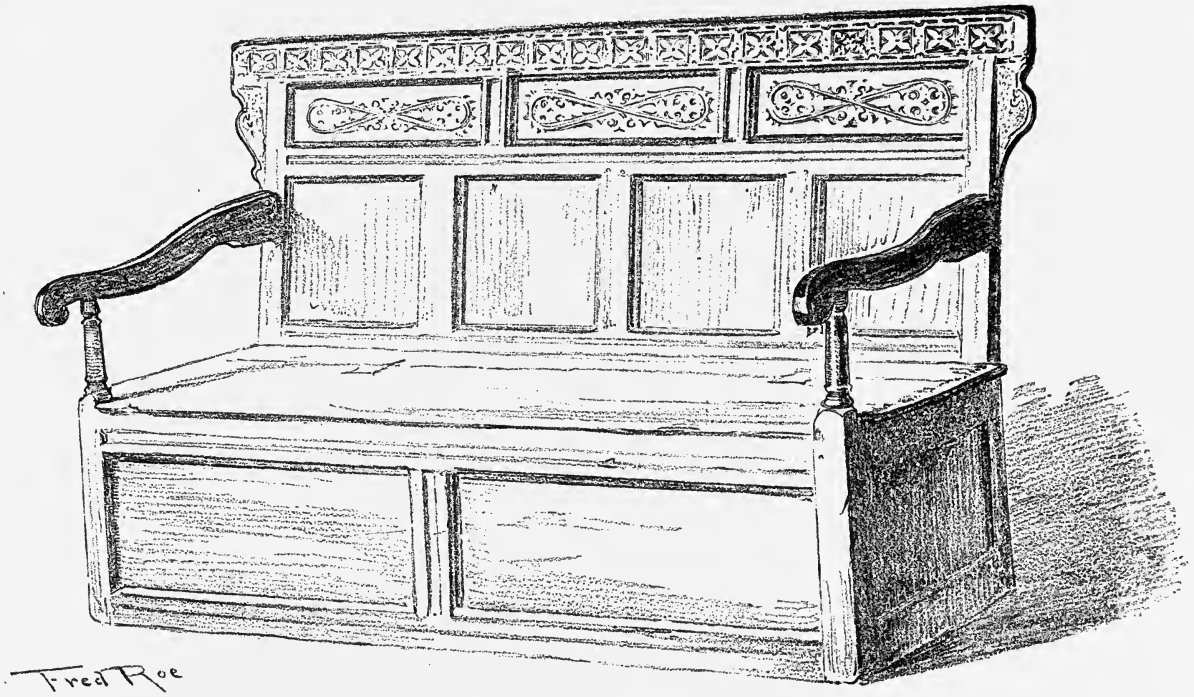
As regards settles, this peculiarity has a distinct object, for we often find that high settles of even the Jacobean period have the end which would be farthest from the fire enlarged into a sort of wing as a protection against draughts, the other end being merely terminated by an arm. Linen-panelled settles and benches are also excessively scarce in England, though they may occasionally be met with on the Continent.

Among the illustrations to Froissart's 'Chronicles' in

the British Museum, in the plate depicting that hackneyed subject the tragical masque of Charles VI. of France, the ladies witnessing the display are represented as seated on a linen-panelled settle of simple but massive form. This settle is placed directly in front of the hooded stone fireplace, but, curiously enough, with its back turned towards the fire. Large settles such as this were usual accompaniments to the great hall, the other domestic apartments being doubtless furnished with benches of smaller dimensions.

Settles and benches of the sixteenth century bearing incised dates are exceptionally scarce. Some of the earliest specimens with which I am acquainted are those in the library of Lichfield Cathedral, which bear carved bands of strapwork and the initials of Zachary Babington, A.M., Rector of Covington, in Leicestershire, who was precentor at Lichfield in 1581 and 1587. Even examples of the subsequent centuries exhibiting genuine dates are uncommon.

Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, in his wonderful collection of domestic antiquities at Rothamsted, has a good settle with panels ornamented with a guilloche, the top rail bearing the legend 'W. M. G., 1686.' This settle is interesting for its mark, but a far finer specimen for its general characteristics flanks the opposite side of the great stone ingle-nook. The latter seat came originally from Warwickshire, and has a bracketed back with oblong top panels finely incised with strap ornament, the top rail being carved with a good jewel band.




ELIZABETHAN SETTLE

In the possession of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, Bart. Height, 3 ft. 6 in.; length, 5 ft. 1 in.

The settles which have been handed down to us from former times are mostly identified with the seventeenth century; many belong to a still later time, but the number of those which can be referred to an earlier period is insignificant. All these post-Reformation settles are simple in their design and construction, possessing but little individualism except in the character of their decoration, which mostly followed the prevailing taste of the period. The main differences in shape and form lie in the height of the back and the arrangement of the part beneath the seat, which was sometimes open, but certainly, as regards seventeenth-century examples, more often closed for the purpose of being used as a box, of which the seat formed the lid. These remarks only apply to the settle proper, for there are several hybrid forms—that is to say, composite or convertible pieces—which are really more than settles, as they serve other purposes in addition to that of a seat. Such pieces seldom have any artistic value, their chief claim to notice being some ingenuity of construction. One type is that in which the back of the settle works upon a pin, and, falling down upon horizontal arms, forms itself into a table, being secured in its position by a latch. Some seventeenth-century specimens of this kind are, or were formerly, in the fishermen's cottages, at Porlock, in Devonshire. Another bastard specimen in this category is the settle whose back forms the door of a shallow cupboard, intended for the reception of the household crockery. There is little doubt that

these devices were intended to economize space, and they are invariably of rough execution.

A specimen of the cupboard settle has passed under my notice which dated from the latter part of the seventeenth century, but which actually contained some portions of Elizabethan strap-carving, inserted no doubt when the piece was constructed. It is more than questionable whether the element of comfort in such pieces was not sacrificed to convenience, and even the latter quality in the settle cupboard would not be quite self-evident to the good-man of the house when ensconced in it smoking his evening pipe should his wife wish to replace the crockery in the cupboard.

Settles were very extensively used in the Northern Counties, and Yorkshire has been raided time after time by relic-hunters with such success that box-seat settles have come to be spoken of by many as being of the 'Yorkshire' type. Brewer, in his account of Westmorland, written at a time when oak-hunting had not seriously commenced, and before local peculiarities had fallen victims to the dispersing influences of the railway, gives a homely and excellent picture of Border life in which the settle figures prominently. Among other most interesting details of the local life and appointments of the period, we learn that:

'Besides the large partition closet, the furniture of the house consisted of a long oaken table, with a bench on each side of it, where the whole family, master, children, and servants, ate together. . . . On

one side of the fire was a seat about 6 feet long, called the *long settle;* its back was curiously carved, and its seat formed a chest with two or three divisions, in one of which the economical housewife laid up, in sorted bundles, thread, buttons, and remnants of cloth, for mending the family apparel. Along the heck side of the fire was the sconce, a sort of fixed bench, under which one night's elden was deposited early every evening. The chairs were of heavy wainscot, with high arms, and carved on the back; but, by being narrow and upright,

> ' " They pressed against the ribs
> And bruised the side, and, elevated high,
> Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears."

Three-footed stools were, however, the most common movable seats. The bedsteads, too, were of oak, with carved testers of the same wood; those on the loft were commonly without either tester or hangings. The dresses of the family, meal, malt, and dried meat, were kept in strong, clumsy chests, the fronts of which were laboriously ornamented with carved borders, and, like the rest of the furniture, joined together with wooden pins instead of nails.'

But a change began to come over the life of these Border Counties even in Brewer's own time, for he mentions that, by the opening up of the district by the mail-coach, the great innovator of his day, the peculiarities of Westmorland were 'verging fast into oblivion.'

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, when the raised centre panel was coming into vogue, we

find that a good many of these 'long settles' are ornamented on the top rail with carving representing dragons or monsters. This appears to have been a form of decoration frequently associated with settles of the period referred to, and it is curious to note that these dragons or monsters very closely resemble those sculptured on Norman stone doorways, thus indicating a return to a rude and archaic style.

Although genuine settles of the Jacobean period are not common, plenty of a later type may be found. About the time of Queen Anne a fashion arose of giving the 'raised centre' panel an ogee-shaped top, and oak settles exhibiting this characteristic as well as the curved leg may be found by scores. The amount of hard ware which settles would naturally receive would account for the fact that they still continued to be made of oak at a period when other woods had almost superseded the use of that material. These late settles do not appeal very strongly to the connoisseur, but are naturally popular as being genuine examples of old oak in the same way as is the gate table.

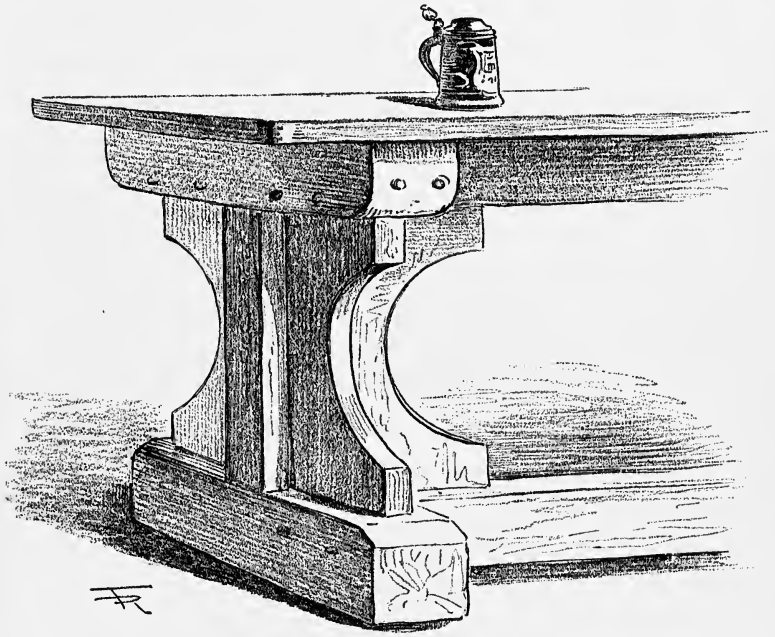
# CHAPTER XII

## TABLES AND FORMS

IN the history of tables we have not anything like such a retrospect as we have in that of other pieces of furniture. It is really astonishing how very few early examples can be referred to. Salisbury Cathedral, rich in other antiquities of a similar nature, possesses a genuine thirteenth-century example in its chapter-house, but this is almost a solitary instance of such a rarity. Like the remains of the famous Round Table at Winchester, it is quite unique and unapproachable, and altogether out of the sphere of the collector.

Mr. George C. Haité, R.I., of Bedford Park, Chiswick, is the owner of a very remarkable early table, to which, for simplicity of design and construction, it would be hard to find a parallel. There is an entire absence of surface decoration from this piece, but its simplicity of form leads one to suppose that it belongs to Gothic times. Perhaps the most unusual feature about it is a sort of flying wing projecting on to the tread bar beneath the table, repeating in itself the lunette form of the ends. Though I have seen scores of tables of dates closely subsequent to the Reforma-

tion, both for high and humble use, I have never seen another to compare with this extraordinary piece. Its early history is difficult to trace with certainty, but there is good reason to believe that it was originally used in one of the foundation schools at Winchester.



EARLY OAK TABLE
In the possession of George C. Haité, Esq., R.I.

Genuine tables of the Gothic period are exceptionally rare. The pseudo-Gothic productions made nowadays in France and Italy ought not to be regarded at all seriously; they are clever frauds with a too circumstantial history attached to each.

Of monkish tables there is an almost entire absence

in England, for most of them were destroyed during the stormy times of the Reformation. A semicircular table exists in the abbey gate-house at St. Albans which came from the abbey church, and is traditionally said to be a monks' table. It is a rough, heavy-framed piece of work, entirely devoid of decoration, and with nothing about it to indicate that it belongs to pre-Reformation times; indeed, its shape and the character of the framing rather suggest that it is coeval with the gate-legged table of the seventeenth century. It is only fair to add, however, that the drawers with which it is fitted are later additions, and the probability is that the table was made for the use of Cromwell's troopers when they occupied the abbey.

That interesting historian, Agnes Strickland, describes an oaken table in the Tower of London which was said to be in existence during the reign of Edward V., and which actually received the murderous blow intended for the head of Lord Stanley when Lord Hastings was arrested in 1483. The story goes that Lord Stanley dodged the blow by getting beneath the table.*

The middle of the nineteenth century was not a period remarkable for the accuracy of such casual descriptions as this. Since Miss Strickland's day much has been done to the interior of the White Tower, where this episode took place, and whatever

* 'Lives of the Bachelor Kings of England,' by Agnes Strickland. London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1861.

has happened to the aforementioned table, it is certainly now no longer there.

An early table exhibiting roughly-carved pointed arches on its stretchers used formerly to stand in the Green Dragon Inn at Combe St. Nicholas, Somersetshire. The magnificent settle which remains at the same hostelry is described in another part of this work, but I am informed by a friend who has recently visited the place that the table is gone.

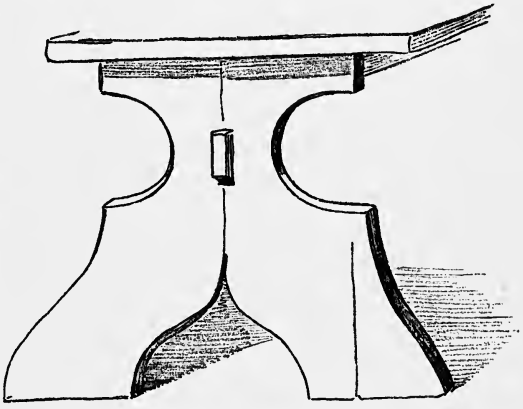


TABLE OF GOTHIC DESIGN
From Tenier's picture 'The Card Players,' Ryks Museum, Amsterdam

There is one very sufficient reason to account for the paucity of early tables remaining. During the feudal period and onwards to the change of habits of the new nobility, which took place during Tudor times, the great hall in the residences of the upper classes was used for a variety of purposes—such, for instance, as the representation of 'mysteries,' the entertainment of guests with dancing and minstrelsy, or such amusements as those provided by *jongleurs* and acrobats. The hall would necessarily have to be cleared for these diversions, a process which would be rendered more than difficult if the apartment contained cumbrous and

weighty pieces of furniture. 'Formes' we continually read about in manuscripts of the Gothic period, and the frequent occurrence of the term 'tressel-bordes' instead of tables clearly points to the use of articles which could be quickly and easily removed.

This is not the only evidence we have. Painted illustrations in contemporary manuscripts of the fifteenth century frequently depict these light and portable pieces of furniture with remarkable accuracy, as well as the appearance of the hall when actually cleared of them for the purposes of after-dinner entertainment. To facilitate removal, tables were sometimes used with what is termed an independent top. In this variety, which is really a developed form of tressel, the legs, which were very massive, were not connected by framing, and were themselves unattached to the table proper, the mere weight of which gave the requisite steadiness to the whole structure. The legs were provided with spreading flanged feet splaying out from their base, and whatever the number of legs used, they were always placed under the centre of the table instead of at its corners. At Haddon a decaying table of this description remains in its original position on the daïs of the Great Hall. In this instance the flanged feet project from the sides of the leg instead of being cruciform in plan. Some tables in the Great Hall at Penshurst, which are seven yards long, have the independent top, but they, together with their attendant 'formes' or benches, are placed at the sides of the hall, and not on the daïs. The Lord's table on

the daïs is framed, and more or less a fixture. These tables at Haddon and Penshurst are probably not of a very early date, being perhaps made in late Tudor times.

It is a fact that the decline of vassalage and the introduction of the private dining-room in Tudor days led to the disuse of the great hall to a large extent for meals, and hence we often find such apartments but scantily provided with furniture. It is evident that the reduction in size of the eating apartment was responsible to a certain degree for the shrinkage in the dimensions of the table. Some of the tables, however, were still of considerable size, and often provided with enormous melon-shaped bulbs on their legs. The best productions of the Elizabethan era are frequently beautifully and elaborately carved, presenting a distinct contrast to their ruder predecessors on the one hand, and to the tables in the severer style which followed on the other. A huge, and yet most exquisitely beautiful, specimen of the Elizabethan banqueting-table may be seen in Abington Hall, near Northampton, and smaller tables of this type may be found, such as the superb carved and inlaid specimen, No. 384, 1898, in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The history of this piece of furniture and its acquisition by the museum authorities is rather interesting. A few years ago it was in the possession of a country clergyman, who, recognising its uncommon beauties, had expressed a hope that it would eventually find a resting-place in one of our national museums. On

the decease of the owner, his representatives made inquiries as to whether a purchaser could be found for it at an extremely modest sum. Fortunately, the inquiries were made of a conscientious man with some knowledge of oak, who forthwith instructed the parties in question to be in no hurry, but to communicate with the museum authorities and to raise the price to £100 —something nearer its proper value. This was accordingly done, with the result that the table was purchased for the nation for £80.

The Abington and Kensington tables demand careful attention and comparison, for, though very similar in structure and decoration, they represent two distinct types, one intended for the banqueting-hall, and the other appropriate to the private dining-room. It may be mentioned that the table in Abington Hall possesses six legs—one at each corner, the other two placed on a connecting-bar running parallel with the length of the table.

In the example at South Kensington there is a sliding extension at each end, by means of which the top can be enlarged to twice its ordinary size. The framework of bars connecting the legs which commences with tables of this period is a curious revelation of the state of the times. The bars were intended for footstools to enable those seated at meat to avoid the necessity of placing their feet upon the rushes with which the floor was strewn.

These were not removed so often as modern sanitation would demand, and, unless freshly strewn, afforded

anything but a pleasant resting-place for the feet. These foot-frames long survived the rush-strewn floors, for in evolution an organ does not disappear immediately that it has ceased to be of use ; but they are none the less an indication of the inconveniences attending that early custom. The love of art was innate in the old constructors, and although they may not actually have intended that an object should be picturesque, much of the picturesqueness came about by the satisfying of needs as they arose.

Fine specimens of Elizabethan tables with the 'melon' leg are rare, and consequently very difficult to acquire. The best specimens of this class have their legs surmounted by an exquisitely-moulded shallow capital, and the bottom of the stretchers immediately above the capitals edged with boldly-sculptured jewel-moulding. A very beautiful example used to exist, and perhaps may still be seen, at Leeds Castle, Kent. It may be remarked here that these 'melons' were so enormous in diameter compared with the rest of the leg that, to avoid waste, it was necessary to build up the bulb with applied material, the surface-carving being executed after the piecing together of the parts. Some of the very beautiful mouldings on the pillar-caps—such, for instance, as the volutes and their returns—were applied, and are liable to become detached through age or rough usage ; hence it is that these most beautiful productions of the Elizabethan period have so often suffered in their outline.

Though tables of such a quality as that at Ken-

sington, recently mentioned, are seldom met with in the world of museums and collections, they still exist in some of our country churches, but in most cases they have descended from their original station in the sanctuary. A magnificent example remains in Blyford Church, Suffolk, and another at Dinton, Bucks. The latter is a strikingly fine piece, of noble proportions, and, except for one unfortunate circumstance, is in a good state of preservation. The caps to its bulbed and jewelled legs have beautifully-carved volutes, above which is a projecting course of handsome jewel moulding. The top stretchers are evidently inlaid, for the mortises, from which some pieces of the lighter wood have fallen, are distinctly visible. This decoration appears to be designed in the form of floral devices and tendrils, but its course, as well as an inscription on the front stretcher, cannot now be well deciphered, the whole piece being at present covered with successive coats of that Georgian paint which antiquaries so much deplore. On the top surface of the Dinton table appears another inscription, which, from the

LEG OF THE TABLE IN DINTON CHURCH, BUCKS, DATED 1606

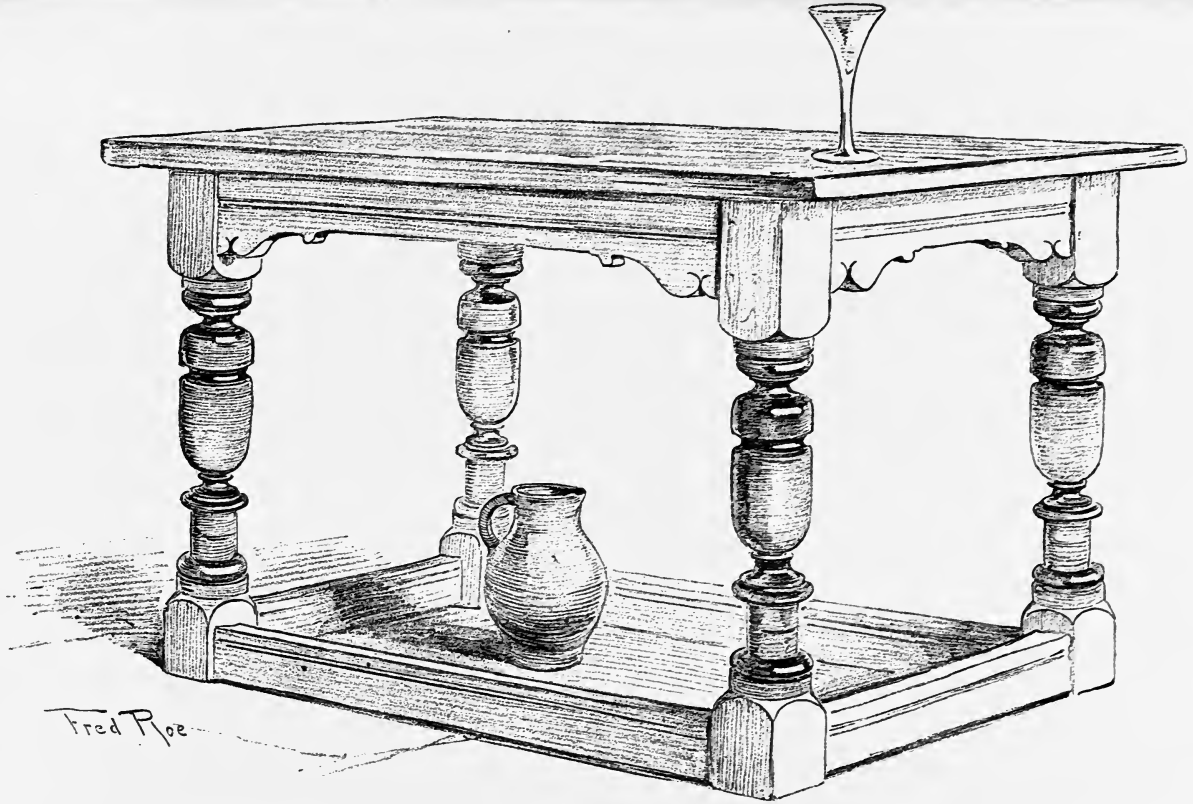



TABLE IN THE POSSESSION OF THE HON. MR. JUSTICE SWINFEN EADY, FIRST HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
Height, 2 ft. 6½ in.; length, 4 ft. 5½ in.; width, 2 ft. 2 in.

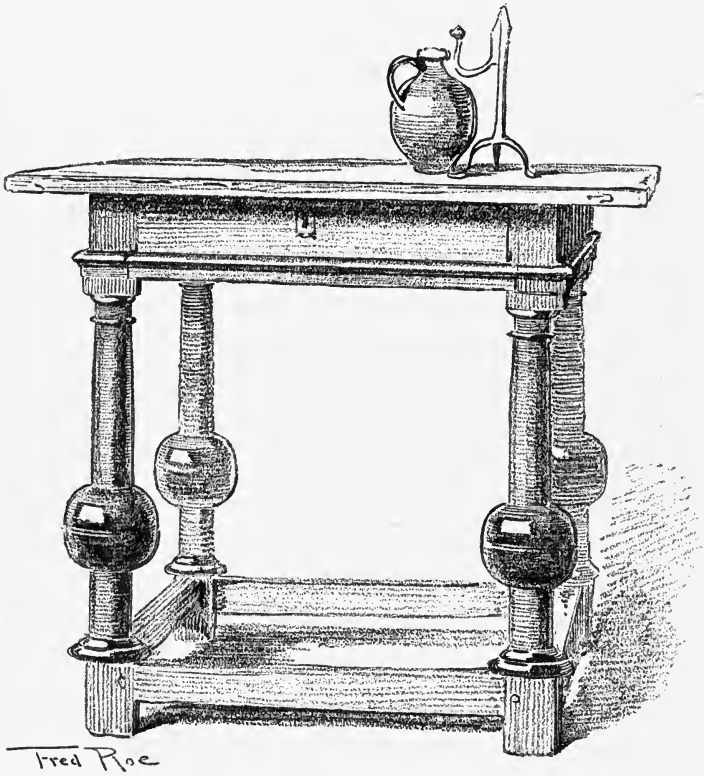
fact of its only being incised, and not filled up with inlay, is perfectly legible. It is worded as follows: 'FRANSIS HVNTTS GEVEN BY THE YOVTH OF VPTON.' This morsel of information carries one's mind somewhat sadly to the decadence of rural England. Upton, a picturesque but poor and straggling hamlet in this parish, would surely not be able to furnish such a superb voluntary effort from the pockets of its youth in these degenerate days. It may be added that Fransis Huntt, was probably at one time Vicar of the parish of Dinton, and the date of the production and presentation of this table is duly recorded by the figures 16 – 06 which are carved on its uprights.

As time went on the 'melon' degenerated into an elongated bulb encircled by a shallow groove, and having a short, straight member immediately beneath it. The carving round the upper stretchers of these tables is often irregular, and on one unquestionably genuine specimen, with which the author is well acquainted, the incised decoration, though rather similar, is actually different on all four sides of the stretchers. This table was discovered in a dilapidated state in a country barn not many years ago. Some wonderfully solid and weighty tables intended for dining purposes may be seen in the hall at Abbot's Hospital, Guildford. The supports are decorated with oblong jewel-moulding, and, like earlier examples, these tables have the independent top. Their origin cannot, however, be earlier than the first quarter of the seven-

teenth century, as the hospital was not completed till 1622. They are accompanied by their respective forms, fine pieces of very bold character.

The melon bulb reappeared in the reign of Charles II., though the Dutch fashion which the taste of that monarch brought over from Holland caused it to assume a squat shape, which, with the exception of the encircling incised groove, was entirely destitute of carving. A fine table of this description, and of enormous size, exists in the Great Hall at Littlecotes, Wiltshire. The view of this apartment in that admirable work, Nash's 'Mansions of the Olden Times,' depicts a party, attired in costume of the reign of Charles II., playing the game of shovel-board upon this very table. Another specimen, of much smaller size, but possessing fine large elongated melon-legs, remains in the parish church at Old Hunstanton, Norfolk. This bulb or melon seems to have had a strange fascination for the designers of the Stuart period, for not only is it found on the tables of characteristic Renaissance type, but the feature is also occasionally found applied to the more severely Doric order — a sort of compromise. The designer has evidently been anxious at the outset to follow a strictly classic model, but has not been able to detach himself wholly from the more debased influences of the Renaissance of the time. The bulb expands baldly from near the centre of an otherwise severely classic column, unaccompanied by any other member, and apparently without any reason for its being there at

all. Specimens of the latter mixture are not often met with, and are excessively curious, being rather of the nature of freaks, and not to be seriously regarded as a blending of the two styles prevalent at the time.




SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY TABLE OF UNUSUAL TYPE, SHOWING TRANSITION BETWEEN THE MELON BULL AND THE PILLAR LEG

One of the obvious characteristics of Elizabethan and Jacobean dining-tables is their great elevation as compared with those of the present day, many examples, after centuries of wear, often measuring

over 32 inches in height. Curiously enough, the chairs and doorways of the same time were relatively low, which makes the height of the table all the more difficult to explain. Simple classic tables of the Jacobean period, small, and approaching to the square in shape, are often met with in old dwelling-houses. They are sometimes provided with drawers, and, when so equipped, are evidently intended for dressing-tables. Occasionally, however, we find, both in square and oblong examples, certain signs which indicate that they formerly fulfilled the function of Communion tables, which replaced the altar in parish churches. One of the signs here referred to is the absence of carving on the stretcher, which was intended to be placed next the East wall while the table was in use. It is needless to say, however, that such decoration as these Communion tables possess is entirely devoid of ecclesiastical symbolism, their ornament in no wise differing from that of those intended for domestic use. There used to be a good example of the Jacobean Communion table in the Red Lion Inn at Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire, which is locally said to have fulfilled the sacred purpose in the chapel of the adjacent 'Hospital.' This ruinous but picturesque building has for generations been used as a barn, and records of the place are so scanty that we have no information as to when its desecration took place. In all probability, however, it was contemporaneous with the dissolution of the monasteries, and if so, there would be some doubt as to whether the table, which is of a date subsequent to the

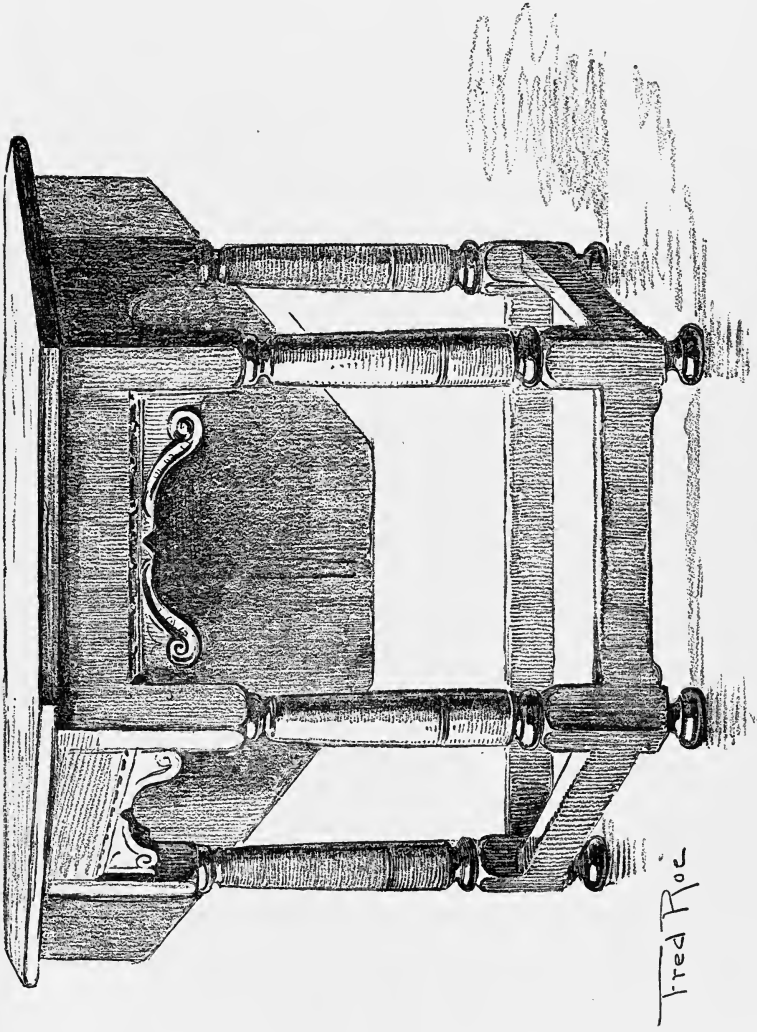
Reformation, was actually used in the place in the manner stated.*

Such cases of degradation, if true, are bad enough, but, all the same, I refuse to share the views of some people, who hold that actual destruction is the only proper treatment for sacred articles which have fulfilled their object and have been superseded.

In the vestry of St. Sepulchre's Church, Northampton, is a Jacobean oak table of good proportions, worthy of careful preservation. An official of the church, seeing it noticed, remarked that it was a pity that it should be used for any other purpose than that for which it was originally intended. In his opinion it ought rather to be burned! There is an ethical aspect of the matter which a remark such as this suggests to the connoisseur, but it is unfortunately ignored by the British public, and presents itself only to those who love antiquities unselfishly, and for their existence as national landmarks. If an antique exists in any old-world dwelling-house or building which has associations with its past history, it is a sin of something more than venial type to acquire and remove it, *if it is cared for in any decent fashion.* To rescue such a piece from wanton vandalism or the continued neglect of ignorant custodians is another matter, and, indeed, some of our finest treasures have been pre-

* Lysons, Dugdale, and Tanner alike show a paucity of information regarding this establishment. The gossiping Hone, in his Year-book (1832), mentions the same tradition concerning the table, but is humorously credulous concerning it.

served in this way by being gathered into the private collections of men of taste. Some stray cases of




OCTAGONAL FLAP-TABLE, TEMP. CHARLES I.

flagrant attempts to remove 'bits' from houses of historic and artistic interest crop up in the writer's

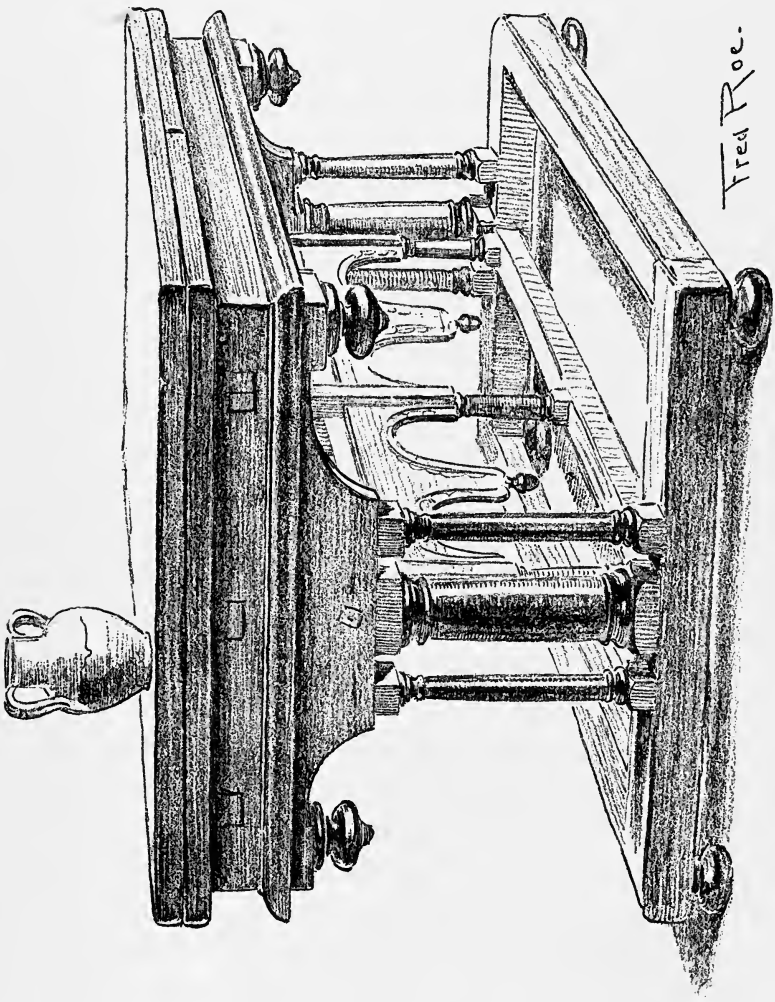
mind. When the wonderful timber-house at Shrewsbury, which was slept in by the Duke of Richmond—afterwards Henry VII.—on his way to encounter the tyrant Richard, was undergoing renovation some few years ago, a very beautiful oak-traceried window of fifteenth-century work was discovered embedded in the plaster. I am imformed that this was scarcely opened out before an enterprising Yankee offered the sum of £250 for the right to transport the window across the Atlantic. To the eternal honour of those to whom the offer was made, it was refused, and the window happily remains.

A recent correspondence carried on in the London press shows that £150 was offered for an old oak table at the cottage, at Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks, in which the poet Milton sought refuge from the Plague in 1665. In this case also the offer was refused. But an even worse fate may befall articles of antique furniture than to be gathered in by a class of small enterprising collectors. A few years ago there could be seen outside the Railway Hotel at Broxbourne a large pillar-legged Jacobean table of good proportions absolutely rotting with decay, and with its base sunk in the mud. Groups of yokels kicked their feet and carved their names upon this ill-used relic, which might have been rescued years ago, but which, when I saw it, was too far gone to be of any value.

The melon-legged table with independent top has already been spoken of. A seventeenth-century variety of table, which may have originally been sug-

gested by this form of construction, exists in many of our old collegiate establishments. Like those of the afore-mentioned type, the legs, instead of being placed at the corners, occupy a central position down the length of the table, though in the latter Jacobean examples the legs are fixed to the top, which is not removable. The so-called 'Wycliffe' table in Lutterworth Church, which is really a production of the Elizabethan period, and possesses no connection with the great reformer, is a specimen of the type in question. It exhibits a broad band of jewel-moulding round its edge, and the principal legs—*i.e.*, those at the ends—are boldly carved in imitation of supporting lions. A finely-designed table appertaining to this type is in the possession of Mr. Walter Withall, of 18, Bedford Row, W.C., and of this we are able to give an illustration. It is of slightly later date than the Lutterworth table, belonging, probably, to the reign of James I. At each end are three supporting pillars, the central ones being more massive than the others. Mr. Withall's table has no jewel-moulding, but it possesses a pendant at each corner, while a simple arcade of four arches runs underneath the centre. A massive tread-bar extends all the way round the base of the table. It should be remarked that both this and the Lutterworth table have the extending leaves, which are supported by runners drawn out of the side. The object represented measures some 65 inches in length, but, with the aid of the leaves, it is capable of being extended to over

10 feet. In evidence of pedigree, it may be worth while remarking that Mr. Withall's table came origin-




JACOBEAN TABLE WITH EXTENDING TOP
In the possession of Walter Withall, Esq., 18, Bedford Row, W.C.
Height, 33 in.; width, 32½ in.; length, 65½ in.

ally from the Abbey Farm, Hungerford. Some good late examples of tables and forms supported by central

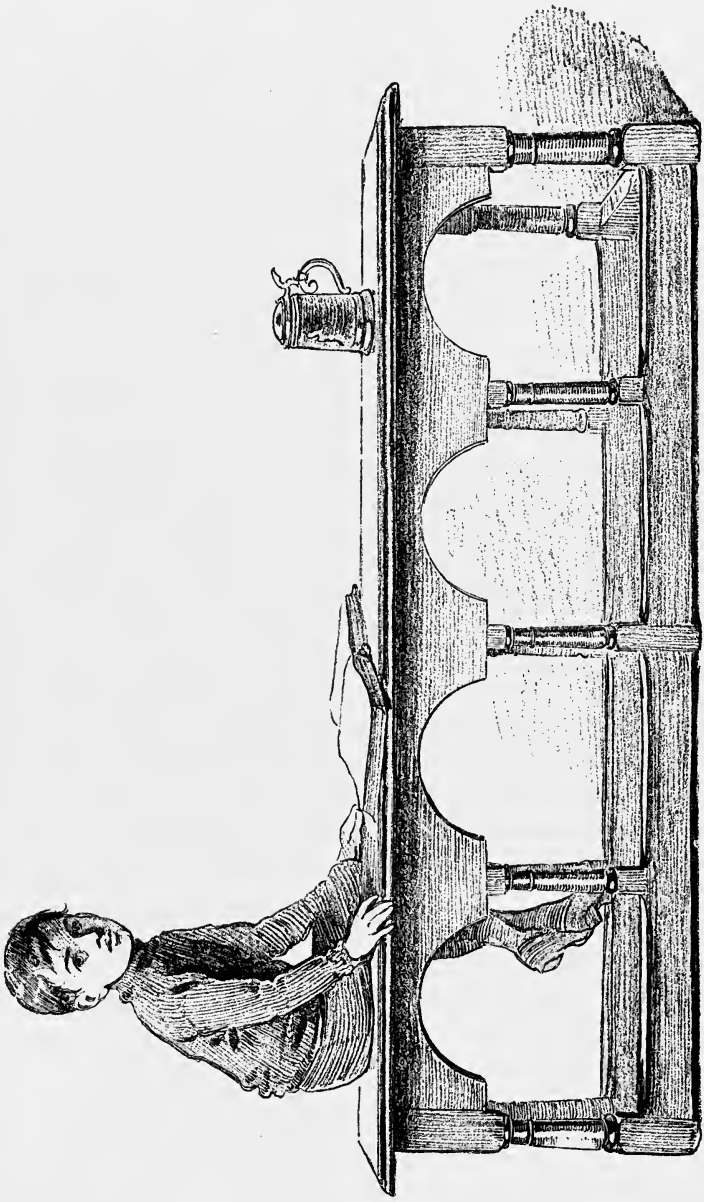
legs may be seen in the halls of Wadham and Jesus Colleges, Oxford.

A totally distinct type in itself is the gate table. This form of table is always oval in shape, the top consisting of three pieces, two of which are in the form of flaps, which may be raised or lowered by the movement of the gate-like legs, from which the type takes its name. The shapes of the legs are various. They may be pillars, spiral twists, and even the ungraceful series of connected balls, which have been described elsewhere. They are sometimes, but rarely, ornamented by a very pretty little foot, which juts out in quite a saucy manner, giving the piece a most delightful character. Gate tables are not at all rare; they may be found in numbers in old-world dwellings of every class, and there is scarcely a dealer in the kingdom who does not keep them in stock. Now and then, however, rare varieties of this type may be found, which are greatly to be prized. Some years ago, when I was engaged with friends on a sketching expedition in an out-of-the-way corner of one of the Home Counties, chance led us towards a semi-ruinous stone dwelling which lay in one of the most lovely and secluded spots imaginable. A quaintly-worded legend over the door indicated that ginger-beer and milk could be obtained within. In the dark apartment of this abode we found an aged couple—an old man well over ninety years sitting in the picturesque chimney corner, while his daughter, an active woman of some seventy summers, was busy heaping sticks upon the open fire-

place. Inside that humble dwelling were some of the most exquisite pieces of oak furniture that it has ever been my lot to see. Amongst other things was a superb gate table *with bulb legs*, an absolutely unique piece of its kind. The clinging of an aged and poverty-stricken couple such as these to the household gods, which they informed me had been in their family for over 200 years, exhibits an example of self-sacrificing pride and reverence that would be hard to match.

The history of antique oak tables is almost brought to a conclusion with the more ordinary specimens of the gate type. A less usual form of gate table is that in which the top consists of one piece, which the gate legs, revolving on a central leg or pivot, allow to fall quite flat on to the substructure, the whole then being capable of being stored in any small, confined space. Gate tables may have existed in Cromwellian times, or even a trifle earlier, but, probably, nearly all those which we now see belong to no date prior to the reign of Charles II., while the majority of them may be even later.

With regard to forms of this late period, an extensive variety may be seen in the halls of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. These have usually but four legs, the two at each end being connected by a short bar, a long, single rail running longitudinally from the centre of one short bar to the centre of the other. Some of these forms are of immense length, several of those, for instance, in the church of All Hallows,



A TEN-LEGGED FORM, MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Barking, being over 12 feet long; these, however, have two central legs, making six in all. Instances are to be found in which these forms are supported by a whole series of legs, front and back, and with the deep stretchers above them cut up into arches, to which the legs act as pillars. In the last-mentioned example, which is a scarce type, the foot-rail necessarily extends all round.

Amongst curiosities in the way of tables, the billiard-table at Knole House deserves special notice, as it is of great age, being attributed to the reign of James I., and said to be the first made in England. It is not certain if this interesting piece is of quite so early a date as that usually assigned to it, but it may belong to the latter half of the seventeenth century. The game of billiards was played in those days with balls which were propelled by an appliance somewhat resembling a glorified shoe-horn. Hoops were also set up towards the centre of the board, from which we gather that the game must have presented some similarity to the modern table-croquet. The 'bed' of the Knole table is of wood, which must have rendered accurate play difficult, owing to the tendency of the material to warp. An illustration of the old method of playing billiards can be seen in a book entitled 'The School of Recreation,' published in 1710, though the costumes of those taking part in the game date from some fifty or sixty years earlier.

# CHAPTER XIII

## BEDSTEADS AND CRADLES

THOUGH a fair number of antique oak bedsteads are still in existence, that number is steadily diminishing on account of the adaptability of bedstead backs for being made up into what are now termed 'overmantels.' These heavy-canopied, massive oak beds do not accord with modern notions of comfort, convenience and health, and their sacrifice is deemed no crime, scores of them having been dismembered in recent years for the purpose of providing material for wall-decoration. English bedsteads of Gothic type are excessively scarce, and complete examples all but unknown. The stories of Gothic origin attached to some of the well-known relics in our great country mansions will not be credited by the experienced connoisseur, for the articles to which they refer almost invariably date from no more remote time than the reign of Queen Bess. Popular legends connecting them with such personages as Queen Matilda, King Duncan of Scotland, or Edward II., may safely, in the light of modern criticism, be discredited.

Some fragments of a linen-panelled bedstead dating

from the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, but a complete and perfect example is found in the Saffron Walden Museum. The latter is a fine production of late Perpendicular workmanship, though it shows slight signs of French or Flemish influence in the decorative detail. The carved posts, which are 'paned' or honeycombed—that is to say, divided into geometrical compartments after the peculiar manner of the period—are in the most perfect state of preservation. This most rare bedstead has been dismembered, apparently for purposes of exhibition, and the several parts placed against the walls of the building. It is, to my mind, a thousand pities that this treatment should have been adopted. Surely it would be better to unite the parts and exhibit the relic in its proper shape, for under present conditions it is somewhat unattractive; but, if re-erected, it would no doubt draw many connoisseurs to this most interesting little country museum. Henry Shaw, in his delightful book 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture,' gives a beautiful plate of a somewhat similar bedstead of the time of Henry VIII., which he describes as being then in the possession of the Rev. William Allen, of Lorely Hall, near Blackburn. He adds the information that 'this interesting example, which, unfortunately, has lost its true cornice, no doubt highly enriched, was observed by Mr. Allen, in the course of his professional duties, in administering to a dying parishioner the last consolations of religion, and purchased by him after the

decease of the sick person from the heir.' This bedstead has obviously been elevated by blocks placed under the corner posts. It would be highly interesting to know what has become of this ornate and valuable piece of furniture. Bedsteads characteristic of the early Renaissance of Henry VIII.'s reign are almost as rare as those sculptured in the preceding style. At Melford Hall, however, the seat of the Rev. Sir W. Hyde Parker, is a bedstead with wonderful posts carved with medallions and scalework decoration, their bases being decorated with lancet-shaped windows. These posts undoubtedly belong to the reign of Henry VIII., if not to that of the preceding monarch, but, unfortunately, the rest of the bedstead is not of the same early date, being obviously Elizabethan.

The great increase in the number of articles of framed furniture, made with a view to permanence, and used by even the middle classes in the reign of Elizabeth, is noted by Harrison in his 'Description of England,' 1577-1587, where he mentions 'their houses furnished with costlie furniture,' and 'their joined beds with tapestrie and silk hangings.'

A contemporary drawing depicting Cardinal Wolsey in bed shows the bed-posts to have bulbs not unlike those characteristic of the Elizabethan period, and it may therefore be taken for granted that the type of bedstead which we know so well, from such famous specimens as that to be seen at Berkeley Castle or the Great Bed of Ware, was not unknown in Wolsey's

time—at least, as far as the outline is concerned. It should be noted that the bedstead represented in the Wolsey drawing is furnished with a canopy to which is attached a hanging of stuff and fringe completely concealing the capitals on the posts. This concealment of the capitals, sometimes by the stuff, sometimes by the woodwork of the canopy itself, is a detail frequently to be observed in bedsteads of the Elizabethan period. In Shaw's plate of the Great Bed of Ware we have a beautiful little detail sketch given of this peculiarity. The Great Bed of Ware is one of the most remarkable antiquities of its kind remaining in the country. It existed for generations in the Saracen's Head Hotel at Ware, Herts, but at present is located in a little house built on purpose to receive it near the inn at Rye House, where it is exhibited to thousands of trippers on Bank holidays and week-ends. We have no documentary evidence as to the date when it was constructed; indeed, its early history is shrouded in obscurity. Shakespeare, however, refers to it in the following lines, spoken by Sir Toby Belch:

'Go, write it in a martial hand; be curst and brief; it is no matter how witty, so it be eloquent and full of invention: taunt him with the license of ink: if thou *thou'st* him some thrice, it shall not be amiss; and as many lies as will lie in thy sheet of paper, although the sheet were big enough for the bed of Ware in England, set 'em down: go, about it.'*

From this allusion we gather that this enormous piece of furniture had already acquired a good deal of

* 'Twelfth Night,' Act III., Scene 2.

notoriety in Shakespeare's time. Some popular fables are told concerning it, and the date 1463 has of recent years been painted on the lower part of the tester, but the bedstead is without doubt of sixteenth-century design and workmanship. It is possible that it may date from the days of Mary, but in all probability it was constructed during the reign of Elizabeth. Still, there are indications of the Renaissance about the details which render the date uncertain. The classic leaf-ornament painted on the cornice might well belong to the earlier period, while the interlaced strap on the pillars supporting the canopy is reminiscent of the 'paning' which characterized late Gothic. The bed is of enormous size, measuring over 7 feet 6 inches in height and nearly 11 feet square on its ground-plan. One of the popular traditions to which the public fondly cling is that the Great Bed of Ware has accommodated twenty-four people at a time. It is not on record how many of these two dozen unhappy occupants succeeded in sleeping. Curious and deeply interesting as this venerable relic is, it cannot be said that it shines greatly in respect of taste. The leaf-covered bulbs which form part of each bed-post rest upon a sort of open temple-shaped structure, supported by five small pillars—a form of construction which, from an architectural point of view, is absolutely without excuse. It may be mentioned that the remains of very old colouring are visible on parts of the carving, and that on the surface of the posts may be seen the impressions of ancient seals and wax, which report

says—however truly or falsely—to be those of the noted people who slept in this bed. This wonderful relic of a past age is not cared for so well as it should be, and damp and time are only too surely carrying out their natural effects upon it.

An Elizabethan bedstead of very similar character to the monstrous piece of furniture just described may be seen in the Bethnal Green Museum. This bedstead, were it in its original state, would doubtless be considered the finer specimen of the two, for every part of it is richly carved in the style typical of the Elizabethan period, and the form, though of considerably smaller proportions, is more compact and graceful than that of the Great Bed of Ware. It is known to have been bought from Turton Tower, in Lancashire, the ancient seat of the Chethams, and is said locally to have been made abroad, and presented by a King of France to one of the Earls of Devon. The arms of the Courtenay family may certainly be seen carved on more than one part of the bedstead; but, sad to relate, this fine piece of furniture has not escaped the attacks of the restorer, and it is difficult to say now what process of renovation it has passed through, saving only that a good deal of the carving at the foot is of modern date. The vague local tradition which attaches to this wonderful wreck of a fine thing is certainly apocryphal. It is indisputably English work of Elizabeth's time, and the story of the French King and Edward, Earl of Devon, receives a nasty jar when one finds that the Earl died in 1566, while the

date 1593 appears on the footboard. This particular bedstead possesses the little secret cupboard at the foot of its posts which is described in the chapter on 'Furniture with Hiding-places.' The floriated bulbs and upper parts of the two bed-posts should be carefully compared, for they present an instance of the casual workmanship which characterized the olden times. Although approximately of the same outline, they do not agree in the length and diameter of the various members. The old practice of copying merely by eye, which was responsible for the irregularity here referred to, though it resulted in deviations from truth, really gave a charm to carved work which mechanical reproduction lacks. A careful engraving of the bedstead in its original home in Turton Tower was published some years ago by Wright in his 'Archæological Album.' There are a great many fine bedsteads of the Elizabethan period in different parts of the kingdom—such, for instance, as the great 'Percy bedstead' at Alnwick Castle, the 'Hathaway bedstead' at Shottery, some fine specimens at Ockwells Manor, and two beautiful examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Contemporary evidence also exists in certainly one case in which a bedstead is represented on a brass. This remarkable piece of work is in St. Nicholas Church, Hurst, near Twyford, Berks, placed there to the memory of Alice Harison, who died between 1574 and 1580. This lady was wife of 'Thomas Harison Esqvier, co-oferer to Queene Elizabeth, who died in childbed of her first sonn Richd. Harison Esqvier, the

father of Sir Richard Harison Knight.' The bedstead in which the lady is represented as lying serves

THE HARISON BRASS IN ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH, HURST, BERKS, SHOWING REPRESENTATION OF A LOCKER BEDSTEAD OF THE TUDOR PERIOD

a double purpose, having four drawers with locks in its substructure :

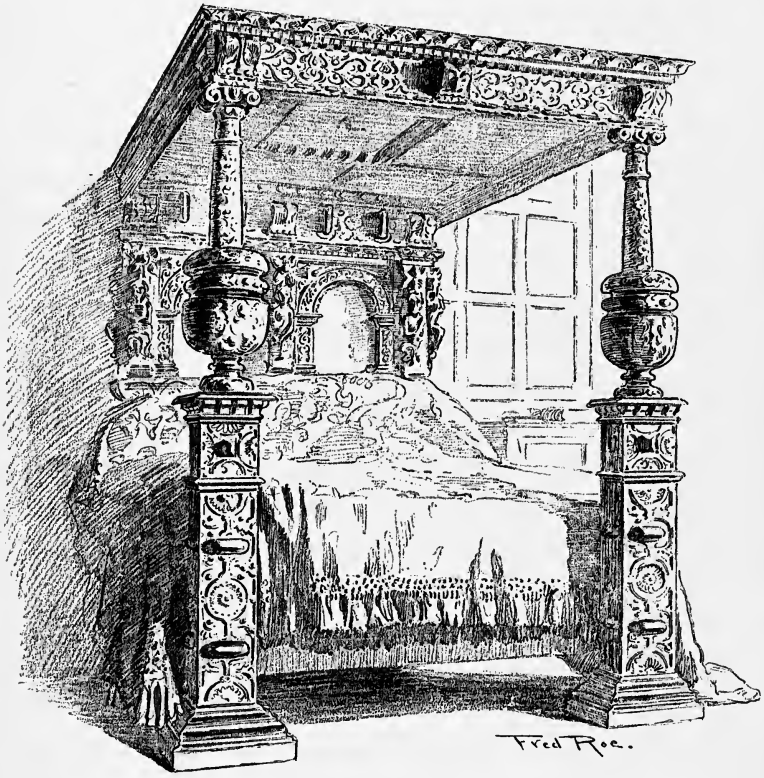
> 'A chest contrived a double debt to pay—
> A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day.'

The bed-posts are of the classic pillar variety, and have curtains twined round them. There is some doubt as to the exact date of the decease of Alice Harison, but, from certain circumstances in the pedigree, it could not possibly be much later than 1580. Bedsteads of the kind we have been describing were held in such high estimation that it is not uncommon to find them specified in the last wills and testaments of substantial people of the period. To go no further, it is well known that Shakespeare bequeathed his second-best bedstead to his wife—a somewhat doubtful compliment on the face of it, but one which has been explained away by the critics—at any rate, to their own satisfaction—their theory being that the bedstead was the property of the heir-in-chief (in this case the widow), in accordance with the custom of the period. It is a question which cannot now be satisfactorily answered as to whether the magnificent bedstead which still remains in the Hathaway cottage at Shottery represents either of these articles. This venerable relic has 'jewelled' posts and panelled back, and is ornamented with caryatides. It may be said that, quite apart from its associations, it merits attention as being one of the most typically English specimens now remaining of its time. Another bedstead, which formerly existed at Clopton Hall, and is said to have been given by Henry VII. to Sir Hugh Clopton, Lord Mayor of London, who built the stone bridge over the Avon at Stratford, was at one time an object of great interest in the Shakespeare country.

How far the legend is true it is now impossible to say, but we have an interesting description of the bedstead given in connection with a remarkable series of forgeries perpetrated at the end of the eighteenth century. In the year 1792 Clopton Hall was visited by a respectable publisher named Samuel Ireland, accompanied by his son. The father had produced, not long before, those well-known volumes, 'A Picturesque Tour through Holland,' etc., and 'Picturesque Views of the River Thames,' illustrated by plates in aquatint, and was planning a new work, the subject of which was to be the Warwickshire Avon. The son, William Henry, at that time a youth of sixteen, was so fired by his visit to Shakespeareland, and by his father's enthusiasm for the poet, that he subsequently entered upon one of the most remarkable, and, for the time, successful, frauds that have ever been perpetrated. The audacity of his pretended discovery of a letter from Shakespeare to Ann Hathaway, enclosing a lock of his hair; of leases and deeds bearing the poet's signature; and, finally, of a complete play, is only to be equalled by the calm conceit with which, after exposure by Malone, he owned up to their fabrication. The shock of the disgrace killed the old man, who, absolutely blameless in the matter, had published in all good faith these precious documents; but, glorying in his baneful cleverness, the son produced several pamphlets on the subject, in one of which, his 'Confessions,' he gives a most picturesque narrative of their visit to Clopton. He describes his discovery in

the cock-loft of the house of piles of broken, mouldering furniture of the time of Henry VII., and relates that he saw in one of the rooms the identical bedstead given to Sir Hugh Clopton by the King, and that it was 'hung with a fine cloth of dark brown, with a rich fringe of silk about 6 inches deep.' All this is very possible, but on his own showing William Henry's veracity was hardly equal to his powers of invention, and his description of the King's present is given here for what it is worth. Nevertheless, some such bedstead with a legend attached to it might have been there at the time of Ireland's visit. The latest reference to it I have been able to discover is in Britton and Brewer's 'Beauties of England and Wales,' published in 1814, but it should be added that Brewer, who wrote the Warwickshire section, implies a doubt of the genuineness of the story of its presentation. Most fables, however wide of the truth, have some foundation on fact, and a legend attached to a bedstead in Littlecote Hall, Wiltshire, the seat of the ancient family of Popham, is founded upon a dark, mysterious tragedy, which was actually threshed out in the Law Courts during the reign of James I. There is a fondness nowadays for pulling to pieces and discrediting ancient traditions, but in this case evidences of the crime and its consequences are too strong to admit of the story being successfully refuted. Up to the time of the discovery of the crime the estate of Littlecote was possessed by the Darrells. The story of their dispossession is a long one, and has been most graphically

summed up in a note to the poem of Rokeby, from particulars supplied to Scott by Lord Webb Seymour. The weird evidence of the midwife given at the trial as to her mysterious visitor on the dark November




ELIZABETHAN BEDSTEAD IN THE POSSESSION OF SIR CHARLES LAWES-WITTEWRONGE

night ; the blindfold ride, followed by her introduction to the magnificent chambers of the unknown mansion ; the brutal murder of the newborn child (on whose mother's account she had been summoned), by its

being thrown on the live embers on the hearth; of the struggles of the infant, spurned fiercely back on to the fire by the boot-heel of the inhuman murderer—all present a picture which has no parallel. The old midwife, however, with a cunning perhaps partly bred from the horrors of the scene, planned within her to unravel the mystery enveloping the crime. As she sat by the bedside, she had, 'with a view to discover the place, cut out a piece of the bed-curtain, and sewn it in again.' As she descended the staircase she counted the steps, and these two clues, weak as they were, proved sufficient to trace the crime to its origin. Darrell, the then proprietor of Littlecotes, was apprehended and tried at Salisbury on the capital charge, but Sir John Popham, the Judge, was, from all accounts, corrupted, and Darrell escaped scot-free, only to break his neck a-hunting some few months later; and, in the meantime, the Littlecote estate passed into the hands of the Pophams. John Aubrey, the distinguished Wiltshire antiquary, who was born in the year 1629, and in whose time, therefore, the memory of so scandalous a crime would be still fresh, gives the following account of the occurrence among other particulars respecting Sir John Popham:

'Sir —— Dayrell of Littlecote, in coun Wilts, having gott his lady's waiting-woman with child, when her travail came, sent a servant with a horse for a midwife, whom he was to bring back hoodwinked. She was brought, and layd the woman, but as soon as the child was born, she sawe the knight take the child

and murther it, and burn it in the fire in the chamber. She having done her businesse, was extraordinarily rewarded for her paines, and sent blindfolded away. This horrid action did much run in her mind, and she had a desire to discover it, but knew not where 'twas. She considered with herself the time that she was riding, and how many miles she might have rode at that rate in that time, and that it must be some great person's house, for the room was 12 foot high; and she should know the chamber if she saw it. She went to a Justice of the Peace, and search was made. The very chamber found. The Knight was brought to his tryall; and to be short, this judge had this noble house, parke and manner, and (I thinke) more, for a bribe to save his life.

'Sir John Popham gave sentence according to lawe, but being a great person, and a favourite, he procured a *noli prosequi.*'

A striking curiosity in the way of a bedstead exists in that old-world home, Rufford Abbey, Notts, the seat of Lord Savile. It is a highly decorative and beautifully finished production, with borders of strap-moulding on the cornice and pillar posts splaying out on to excessively broad bases. The back, which is inlaid with late strapwork, has a centre panel representing the view of a classic building, whilst the foot-board possesses boldly-raised and faceted panels. Nearly the whole of the interior of Rufford Abbey was remodelled in 1679, and the bedstead, which was probably made about that time, is a most valuable illustration of

the transition from the Elizabethan outline to the later style.

One of the features of the earliest types of bedstead with which we are acquainted is the lowness of the canopy and the framework on which the mattress rests. The Great Bed of Ware is, of course, an exception, but, generally speaking, it was not until the reign of Charles II. was reached that bedsteads assumed the lofty proportions which we are accustomed to associate with the types existing at Hampton Court, Holyrood Palace, Haddon Hall, Hardwicke Hall, and other great houses. These latter, with their elaborate rococo cornices, their pall-like hangings, and their funereal plumes surmounting the corners of the canopy, are the types on which Dickens drew for his description of the Maypole state bed in 'Barnaby Rudge.'

A great many of the more unpretentious oak bedsteads, made for the commoner class in the Jacobean times, had no bed-posts or hangings, but were wonderfully picturesque withal. The writer recollects seeing, some few years ago, at Lympne Castle, in Kent—that wonderful old fortified farm-house overlooking the sea—a couple of these low, postless bedsteads standing in a large linen-panelled apartment, and was much struck with the picturesque appearance which they presented with their snowy linen, illustrating as they did the continuity of life in some of our old country houses.

Such bedsteads as the lofty and hideously ornate structures which are to be seen at Hampton Court

Palace or Hardwick Hall do not come within the scope of the present work. They are seldom constructed of oak, belonging as they do to no earlier date than the latter part of the seventeenth century. 'Queen Mary's bedstead' at Holyrood has been already alluded to in Chapter VI., and there are many instances of legends being tacked on to these funereal couches by the ignorant equally absurd as the Holyrood fable. There is a tall bedstead of this type at Haddon Hall, with an extravagantly elaborate canopy, upon which appear the initials 'K.R.' Of the wild legends locally prevailing about this structure it would serve no good purpose to speak. It is, however, probable that the cipher is that of Katherine of Braganza, the consort of Charles II., though what connection that lady had with Haddon Hall can only be a matter for conjecture.

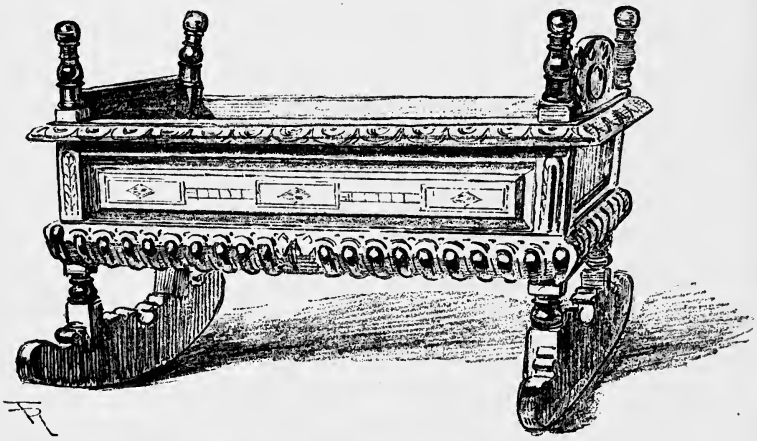
Old oak cradles are highly interesting pieces of furniture, though they are scarcely ever used nowadays, through their want of adaptation to modern requirements, but they may occasionally be found in cottages in remote rural districts. Henry Shaw, in his excellent book on 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture,' gives a fine plate of a Gothic cradle in which, it is said, Henry of Monmouth, afterwards Henry V., reposed when an infant. This statement he supports by a well-authenticated pedigree of the piece in question. The cradle is suspended on a single upright at each end, the uprights being buttressed with spandrels decorated with a conventional vine-leaf, and sur-

mounted with carved representations of the dove. There can be little doubt that the cradle is of the time assigned to it by Shaw, the decoration being particularly pure and characteristic. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon Shaw's fine work, not only on account of the faithful representations of the objects which he gives, but for the pains which he took to hand down to posterity records of past times, which were not sufficiently cared for in his own day. For instance, he mentions, in his account of this plate, 'the beautiful foliage which fills the space between the uprights and stays of the stand of this cradle were never before engraved, although Bonner, in his Itinerary (*The London Magazine* for 1774), and Bingley, in his tour through North Wales, pretended to give representations of this interesting piece of antiquity.' The 'Monmouth cradle' is described as being then (1836) in the possession of Mr. G. W. Braikenridge, of Brislington, near Bristol. It is to be hoped that this beautiful and unique example of fifteenth-century art is still in existence.*

Of historic cradles we have indeed not a few remaining, though no other so early as that just mentioned. The cradle of King James VI. of Scotland (James I.) is in the possession of the Earl of Mar and Kellie. It is a fine piece of work, though greatly decayed. It has a turned rocking-post at each corner, a broad, semicircular band of gold jewel-moulding, and sides inlaid

* I am informed that the cradle mentioned is most probably the so-called Henry V.'s cradle at Monmouth Castle.

with dark and light wood.* At Hatfield House is a carved oak cradle having panels decorated with strap-work and 'rockers' similar to those of the example last mentioned. This cradle is traditionally said to have been used by Queen Elizabeth when an infant, the basis of the fable evidently being the initials 'A.R.,' which appear boldly carved on the ends, these presumably indicating 'Anna Regina.' Unfortunately for



CRADLE OF JAMES VI. OF SCOTLAND (JAMES I.)
In the possession of the Earl of Mar and Kellie

the truth of this tradition, the cradle belongs to a period some sixty or seventy years subsequent to the time of Anne Boleyn, and could not possibly have been carved in her time.

But, just as in the case of the Holyrood legend it is possible with some assurance to associate Queen Mary of Modena with the bedstead popularly supposed

* This historic relic was exhibited at the Stuart Exhibition at the New Gallery, 1889.

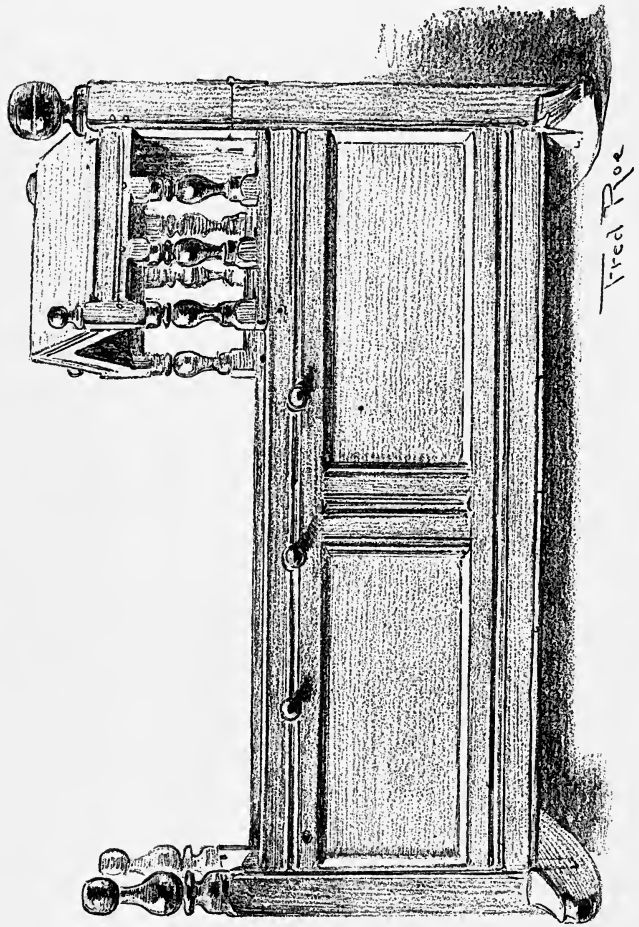
to be that of Mary Queen of Scots, so, in regard to the Hatfield cradle, it may be suggested with confidence that the initials it bears are those of Anne of Denmark, consort of James I., and not those of Anne Boleyn.

Hatfield House was settled on Anne of Denmark, though she afterwards exchanged it in 1607 with Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, for the Palace of Theobald's. None of Anne of Denmark's children were born on the English side of the Border, but it is probable, considering her connection with the Hatfield House, that the cradle in question may have been used for one or all of her first three children, though the presumption is that it could not have been used for the infant Charles, who was born two years after the exchange had been made with the Cecil family.

It is an unpleasant and difficult task to attack the legends which connect great personages of the past with existing objects, but I cannot refrain, in the Hatfield instance, from attempting to dissipate an unsound but popular belief. To anyone who has studied styles or periods in the changes of decoration of furniture, it must be evident that the cradle of James VI. of Scotland is really earlier than the so-called Queen Elizabeth's cradle at Hatfield House.

Later oak cradles exhibited very little difference from those of which we have been treating save in the character of their decoration, in which respect they followed the fashion of the day, assuming the changes which came about in other forms of oak furniture.

One addition, however, appears to have been made, and that was the provision of a hood over the head. Cradles which exhibit this feature usually belong to no




CRADLE
In the Victoria and Albert Museum

INSCRIPTION CARVED ON THE BACK

earlier period than the latter part of the seventeenth century, and usually have the plain raised centre panel.

There is a very characteristic Carolean oak cradle in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which possesses the prototype of the hood in a raised back at the upper end.* This cradle bears the inscription :

'October C. B.
1641
14 Dai M.B.'

Another cradle in the same Museum exhibits a peculiarity in the shape of a hinged and movable hood. On the outside end of this hood appears the date 1691, accompanied by the letters 'F. M. G.' This piece has plain panels with lightly-grooved stiles, and the sides of the hood have turned rails instead of being panelled, as in the accompanying specimen, made fifty years earlier.

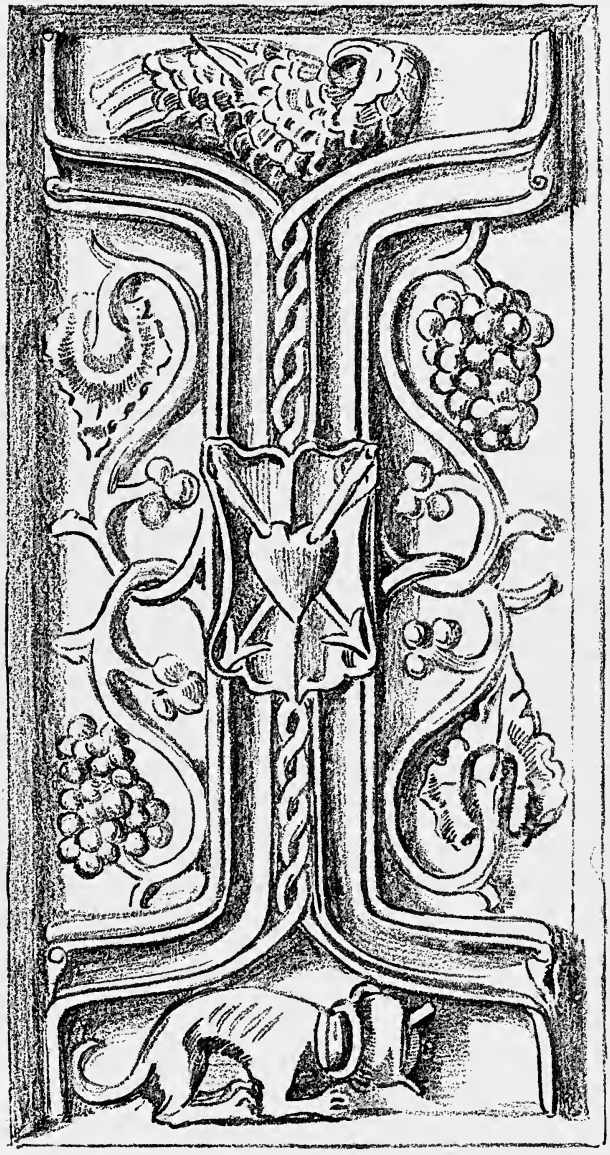
* No. 527, 1892.

# CHAPTER XIV

## PANELLING AND FITTED FURNITURE

THE practice of panelling or lining the interiors of buildings with wainscot dates from very early times, for we find it referred to in ancient documents, but there is good reason to believe that, apart from examples to be found in some ecclesiastical buildings, the oldest panelling still remaining in its place does not date earlier than the fifteenth century. Specimens of this date even are rare enough, and belong mainly to the latter end of that epoch.

Complete rooms full of panelling of the early part of the sixteenth century, although not common, are still to be found in considerable numbers all over the country. The types which we associate with the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII. are the famous linen panel in all its diverse variations, the medallion portrait panel, embellished with arabesques, and, lastly, that curious form of Gothic decoration which the French denominate *parchemin* from its resemblance to a strip of that material. Sometimes two, or even all three of these varieties were employed for the decoration of one room, rendering the effect very rich



*Fred Roe*

PARCHEMIN PANEL WITH ROPED CENTRE, AND CARVED WITH EMBLEMATICAL FIGURES AND VINE DECORATION, ABINGTON HALL, NORTHANTS, BEGINNING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

and gorgeous. There is hardly a county in England that cannot boast of some specimens of this art. To mention only a few, reference may be made to such old-world buildings as Smithills Hall, Lancashire; Thame Park, Oxon.; the dining-halls of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Magdalen College, Oxford; Tolleshunt Darcy, Essex; Abington Abbey and Stanford Church, Northants; the Vine, Basingstoke, Hants; Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk; Agecroft Hall and Speke Hall, Lancashire.

These are places which have never lost their ancient dignity; but there are innumerable instances of buildings, once inhabited by the great and wealthy, which have fallen from their high estate. Of these, an admirable example is the Neptune Tavern, near the quay at Ipswich.

To true lovers of antiquities the spoliation of an old building must always savour of barbarism, but it must be remembered that taverns, from their very nature, are not the places best adapted for the preservation of architectural relics of a perishable character. A magnificent room full of panelling, with a superbly-carved overmantel in the style of the early Renaissance, was saved from wanton defacement some years ago by being removed from Sir Anthony Wingfield's* old mansion, now the Tankard public-house, at Ipswich. These fittings were transported in 1843 to a place of safe custody at Holywells, the seat of the Cobbold

* Sir Anthony Wingfield was Captain of Henry VIII.'s guard and one of the executors of that monarch.

family. They include a remarkable run of panelling decorated in the ornate style of the early Renaissance, and forming an arcading, the arches of which are separated by pilasters. The tympana are filled in with shields and supporters. But the most remarkable feature of this superb room is its fireplace, which possesses an overmantel flanked and supported by pillars of a florid character, decorated with the acanthus-leaf, the centre displaying an oblong, carved panel sculptured with a much-disputed basso-relievo, which has been conjectured to represent such widely-separated subjects as the Battle of Bosworth and the Judgment of Paris.*

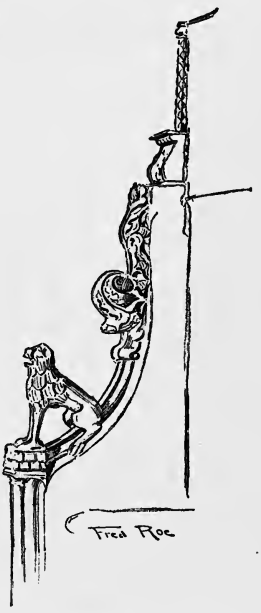
At the Old Baptist's Head Inn, near St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, rebuilt a few years since, a fine run of early linen panelling was formerly to be seen in the very picturesque tap-room. This house was once the residence of Sir Thomas Foster, a Judge in the Court of Common Pleas, who died there in 1612, and, with its beautiful carved stone mantelpiece, was, so far as its interior was concerned, one of the most picturesque of old London taverns, until the ruthless hand of the restorer improved its ancient features out of existence during the nineties. The Neptune Tavern, before mentioned, is an extremely interesting building, evidently in its palmy days the residence of

* Clarke's 'Description of Ipswich,' 1830. The author of this work laments that in his time fresh depredations were daily committed upon this curious relic, and mentions his fears that it would 'soon have to be numbered with the things that were.'

a merchant prince who did not disdain to live over his counting-house near the busy riverside, as was the custom in the old days. In addition to some Tudor mantelpieces, this house still retains in its club-room at the back of the premises a magnificent run of linen panelling, topped midway up the wall with oblong panels some 4 inches in height and over 2 feet long, carved with exquisite arabesques, including masks and dolphins, skilfully and beautifully treated. Although heavily coated with paint, a more perfect specimen of this art for quality could not be found. In an apartment at the top of the house is a feature which is rarer by far, a dresser or sideboard, adorned with linen panels and projecting heads in medallions, let into the wall and surmounted with a pierced cornice in the style of the early Renaissance. It may be mentioned that the front of the house bears the date 1639, but the façade is evidently more modern than the back of the house and its courtyard, which date from the early years of the sixteenth century. The house remained as a private dwelling certainly up to the middle of the eighteenth century, for it is not mentioned in the list of Ipswich inns at that date. Immediately opposite the Neptune is a retiring little house which, till quite recently, contained another very remarkable panelled apartment, to which I shall have occasion to refer later on.

All over the country, and along the East coast line especially, these wonderful linen-panelled apartments remain, cut up into tenements and offices, in the

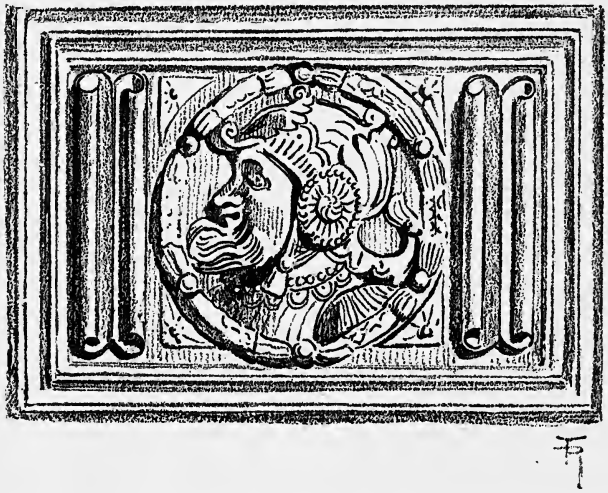
manner that many at King's Lynn are, speaking eloquently of the increase of wealth and comfort that marked the era of peace succeeding the Wars of the Roses. That wonderful flint and stone building, the Dolphin Inn, once Bishop Hall's Palace, at Heigham, near Norwich, still contains some relics of its former grandeur in the shape of some Jacobean fireplaces and a magnificent Gothic staircase newel, the latter decorated with a poppy-head and heraldic lion. It is to be feared that the surroundings of this once noble mansion, which comprise a class of very small tenements, will for ever prevent a return of the building to its former high status.



STAIRCASE NEWEL AT THE DOLPHIN INN, FORMERLY BISHOP HALL'S PALACE, HEIGHAM, NEAR NORWICH

To return to the old English mansions, Haddon in itself offers a really remarkable field of study. The screen of the great hall, with its fifteenth-century tracery, is one of the earliest examples of panelling to be found in this country, consisting of huge planks of unjoined wood mortised into chamfered uprights; and to carry out such woodwork as this on any large scale a forest must have contributed its choicest trees. It is in the dining-room at Haddon, however, that we find the most interesting panelling. This is carried

out in the style that prevailed in the reign of Henry VIII., and was erected by Sir George Vernon in 1545. The moulding round the edges of the stiles is simply a plain, heavy bead without any mitring, although the frieze and cornice are highly decorated in the mixed styles of the late Gothic and early Renaissance, and in the recess of the bay-window are



PANEL CARVED WITH MEDALLION AND LINEN-FOLD, IN THE DINING-ROOM, HADDON HALL

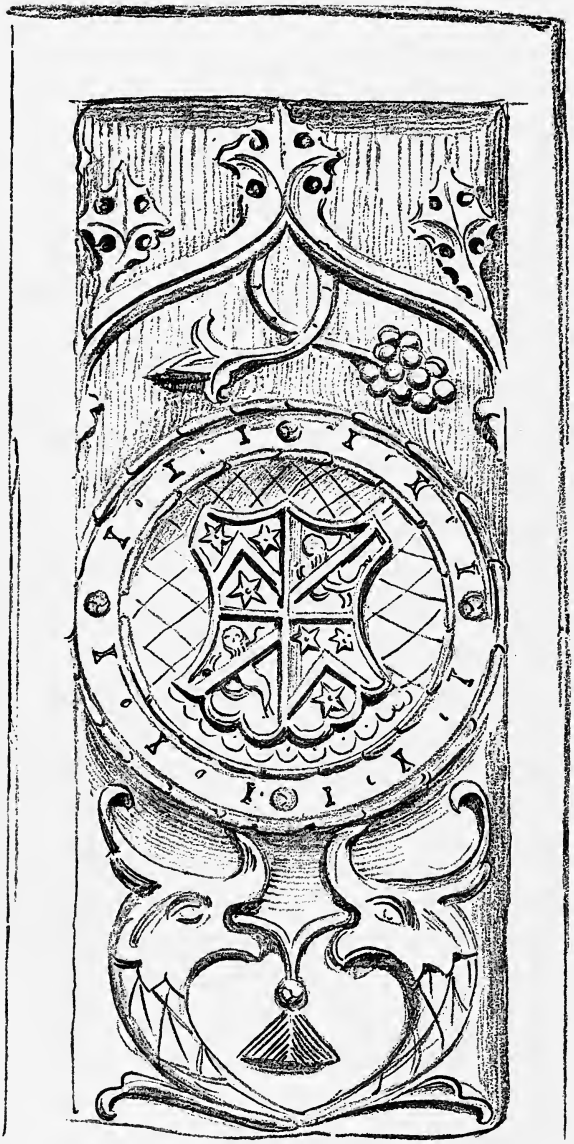
Erected by Sir George Vernon in 1545

some very interesting portrait panels, one of which, bearing the typical grotesque smile of the period, the cicerone will possibly inform visitors is the portrait of a jester. This legend, however, need not be taken too seriously. The smile counts for nothing, since it was a common characteristic of these medallion heads, which are generally supposed to represent long-nosed

Francis I., 'the handsomest man of his time.'* In the tier below the so-called 'jester panel' are a couple of veritable portraits carved in low relief on the surface of the wood, and locally said to represent Henry VII. and his Queen. This, again, is probably a fable, seeing that the panelling of the room, as already mentioned, bears the date 1545. It is much more probable that they are the portraits of Sir George Vernon and his wife, taken at the time that the dining-room was fitted with panelling, for the dress, so far as it is seen, especially of the lady, is that usually associated with Holbein's portraits of courtly personages of the time of Henry VIII., and therefore could not well be assigned to the earlier reign.

Probably one of the finest displays of combined medallion and linen panelling is that at Smithills Hall, Lancashire. The history of this building and its structural alterations is preserved, and it is considered almost certain that a good portion of this internal decoration was added by Sir Andrew Barton during the reign of Henry VII. The knight's rebus, by the way, with his initials, 'A. B.,' may be seen incorporated in the panelling of one of the rooms. The top tier of panelling, next the cornice, is enriched with pilasters of Gothic design, beneath which appears a tier of panels with carved medallion portraits of the family. From the character of the head-dresses of some of these personages it would appear as though

* At Rye House Inn is a medallion panel bearing an actual jester's head in the typical cap and bells.



*Fred Roe*

PANEL FROM SIR ANTHONY DENNY'S HOUSE AT WALTHAM ABBEY

(Size of panel, 24 × 10¼ in.) An attempt of an English craftsman to imitate Italian design, though still retaining certain Gothic features

these portraits were executed late in the reign of Henry VII., as they verge on the Holbeinesque style, to which reference has already been made. A run of panelling of a somewhat similar character has of recent years found a home in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This example once formed part of the internal fittings of the abbey house at Waltham Abbey, which was granted, at the dissolution of the monasteries, by Henry VIII. on lease to Sir Anthony Denny. The panelling in question possesses its original overmantel, with a boldly projecting central head, the material forming the mask being applied in the peculiar manner described in the chapter on 'The Renaissance and After.' The carved designs on these panels indicate a distinct endeavour on the part of an English craftsman to assimilate the dying Gothic with the new style. Many of the panels exhibit the figure of a pomegranate, which would seem to point to their being produced at a time previous to the disfavour of Catherine of Arragon.

Fine as are the specimens which have just been mentioned, they are certainly equalled by the marvellous room full of panelling, which has been more than once referred to, at Abington Hall, Northampton. A book could well be written on the Abington Hall room alone. The linen panelling is elaborate and gracefully designed, certain of the folds being embellished with the ribbon pattern, and the cornice is decorated with a running grape-vine sculptured in

high relief. The most singular features, however, are the *parchemin* panels, which appear in various portions of the room, as well as a series of oblong subject panels, which constitute a sort of frieze between the linen panels and the cornice.

The *parchemin* panels are enriched with shields, on which appear the emblems of the Passion, the five bleeding wounds, and other devices. They furthermore exhibit such allegories as the fox preaching to the geese, or devouring the faithful, and the features of our Blessed Saviour's countenance impressed on Saint Veronica's handkerchief, which is supported on either side by an angel equipped in a complete outfit of feathers. The angels are canopied with large decorative mitres. In many of the panels appears the figure of a monkey, or monkey-headed man, who in one compartment is represented as nursing a baby in swaddling-clothes, while an irate-looking female in the five-cornered head-dress beats him with her distaff. The frieze panels are equally curious and remarkable, and the subjects are so diversified that one can only attempt to give a short account of them.

In one compartment a regal banquet is represented—a page offering the loving-cup on one knee, while without the slaughter of the fatted calf is depicted. Another compartment displays the diverting tricks of jugglers and acrobats to the tune of the pipe and tabor, which are played by one of their company. Sowing, tilling, and reaping are also represented, while a gentleman up to his waist in a vat in a tiled cellar treads grapes

for the vintage. A smartly-attired youth wearing the lamboys, or pleated skirt, knocks down acorns from a tree for the hogs to feed upon; while, again, a shaven monk energetically reproves a flute-playing youngster for shooting a bird with bow and arrow.

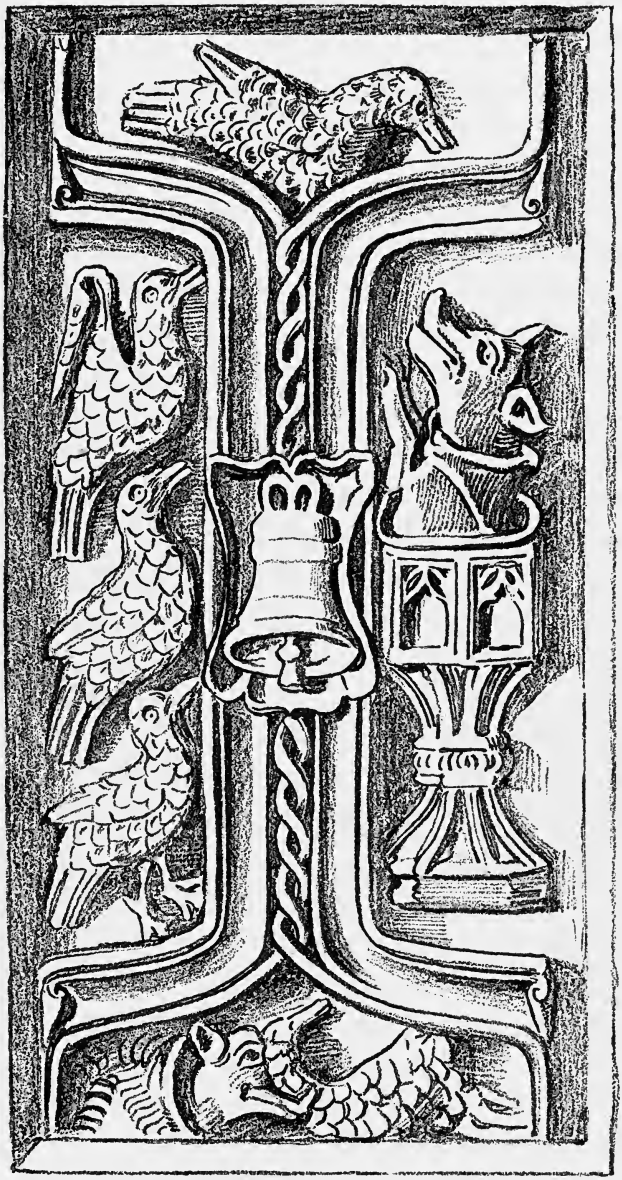
Those who ponder over medieval legends can attribute what significance they please to these subjects; suffice it to say that, apart from the allegorical interest, the humour displayed is wonderful. Finally, we may mention one of the quaintest of the series, an alchemist mixing his elixirs, while outside a yokel in smock and tabard gazes at the stars. The artist's attempt to place the fireplace and hake in perspective are truly comical. Above the fireplace is a large panel bearing a lozenge on which appears a shield of arms, a knight's helmet with a tasselled lambrequin, and the initials 'M. I. B.' The date of this remarkable wall decoration is evidently early in the reign of Henry VIII., for though its main features are purely Gothic, there are certain details in the style of the early Renaissance appearing upon the *parchemin.* The costume of the figures upon the frieze panels also leaves little doubt that it was executed in the eighth Henry's reign, the puffed and slashed costumes of the men, with their characteristic knee-breeches, as well as the five-cornered head-dress of the women, being typical of the period. At the same time, an investigation of the allegorical aspects of the carving reveals the work of a craftsman who, while he has not broken wholly away from monkish traditions, has yet, nevertheless, imbibed

that spirit of free criticism of ecclesiastical affairs born of the degeneration of the Church.

There is no sign of the dolphin among the decorative details, which would seem to support the theory that this panelling was executed at the commencement of Henry's reign, and before the alliance with Francis I. took place. It should be mentioned that at the time of writing the whole of this precious panelling is thickly coated with paint, the removal of which has, however, been contemplated.

Not much is known of the early history of Abington Hall, but there is a glamour of shadowy romance attaching to its occupation in the seventeenth century. It is thought in the locality that some of the Shakespeare MSS. may be concealed behind this panelling, as the daughter of Susanna Hall (Shakespeare's favourite daughter), wife of John Hall, gent., married a Thursby, who owned and occupied this house. To demolish this fallacy, it is only necessary to mention that the panelling has been removed from its original position in the house since Thursby's time, probably when certain alterations were made during the Georgian times.

Panelling of Henry VIII.'s time presents some curious features. On presses, chests, and even wainscotting it will often be found that, whereas two or even three sides of the frame are edged with a moulding, the fourth side retains the old Gothic stop champfer. The corners of the mouldings are likewise mitred, whereas in early examples the upright beads or mould-



*Fred Roe*

PARCHEMIN PANEL WITH ROPED CENTRE AND BEARING THE FABLE OF THE FOX AND GEESE IN ALLUSION TO THE PREACHING FRIARS, AT ABINGTON HALL, NORTHANTS, COMMENCEMENT OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

ings would be carried into the return of the transom above. The difficulty of joining mouldings under this condition with any nicety probably originated the custom of tapering off the bead with a gash, as it were. This was found a very easy method of decorating the edges of the stiles, and as time went on it was sometimes exclusively adopted in the treatment of furniture, with a view to saving trouble on the part of the craftsman. The oblong top panel, bearing carved arabesques, such as exists in the Neptune Inn at Ipswich, was the forerunner of a stile which became generally popular in Elizabethan times, though its later ornamentation was in the form of strapwork, such as is shown on pp. 40, 45.

The main differences between the wainscotting of Elizabeth's days and that of the later periods lie in the greater elaboration of the former, both as regards the shaping or quartering of the panels, and the richer detail of sculptural embellishment. This, of course, refers to the superior workmanship which would be found in the principal apartments of the houses of wealthy people.

Panelling, such as was placed in inferior rooms or passages, differed little from Elizabeth's time to that of the last of the Stuarts, except in an increase in the superficial area of the panels themselves. A feature of great beauty in certain Elizabethan panelled rooms may be found in the decorative pilasters which divide the panels at intervals. Londoners who do not wish to travel afield need go no farther than Canonbury

Tower to study some of the finest specimens of this feature which can be found anywhere. This till recently neglected building is said to have been a portion of the mansion erected by the celebrated Prior Bolton, who ruled the destinies of St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield, from 1509 to 1532. About the year 1599 the property passed into the hands of Sir John Spencer, who embellished and improved the building, and to his taste we no doubt owe the two magnificent panelled apartments which still remain. Both of these have fine carved fireplaces, and one of them is fitted throughout with magnificent quartered panelling, embellished with pilasters, adorned with the most exquisite arabesque strapwork, the bases of the columns bearing masks in relief, with decorative scrolls. Goldsmith for a time occupied the first floor of Canonbury Tower, and it is said that here, in the lower oak room, he wrote 'The Deserted Village.'

The fireplaces in Elizabeth's days became one of the principal features in an apartment, and the superb pillared and panelled overmantels which adorned them must be familiar to everyone who is acquainted with old English mansions of the period. Perhaps the nearest approach to the Elizabethan overmantel in earlier days is the elaborate fireplace of Sir Antony Wingfield's mansion (now the Tankard Inn) at Ipswich, removed during the thirties to Holywells. Extending from mantel to ceiling, pillared, and with deeply-recessed panels, these imposing productions sometimes possess two stories or tiers of arches,

enclosing shields, helmets, and lambrequins, carved in bold relief, as at Levens Hall, Worcestershire. In others a central panel of large dimensions exhibits the shield with its accompaniments even more boldly carved, flanked on each side by canopies in the form of a classic arch, underneath which appear figures in a semi-romanesque costume. A good example of this kind exists in the state room at that well-known old-world mansion, Chastleton House, Gloucestershire. Again, the varieties of this superb feature are so diverse and many that a good-sized volume could be written upon the subject of Elizabethan fireplaces alone.

The influx of wealth in Elizabeth's time was so remarkable that many houses of the middle classes contained fireplaces and fittings modelled on the lines of those just described, but of smaller dimensions. At a modest little dwelling in Fore Street, Ipswich, immediately opposite the famous Neptune Tavern, recently mentioned, once dwelt Thomas Eldred, one of the buccaneer captains of the Elizabethan period. This navigator is said to have sailed round the world with his friend Cavendish, also a resident of Ipswich—a voyage duly recorded by paintings which appear upon three panels of a fine carved overmantel in the front room of the house. These represent severally Thomas Eldred himself, with a telescope applied to his eye, the world, and a full-rigged ship, presumably the vessel in which he made his voyages. On the central panel, beneath the globe, are these lines :

'He that travels ye world about
Seeth God's wonders and God's works.
Thomas Eldred traveled ye world about
And went out of Plimouth ye 21 of July, 1586,
And arrived in Plimouth again the
9 of September, 1588.'

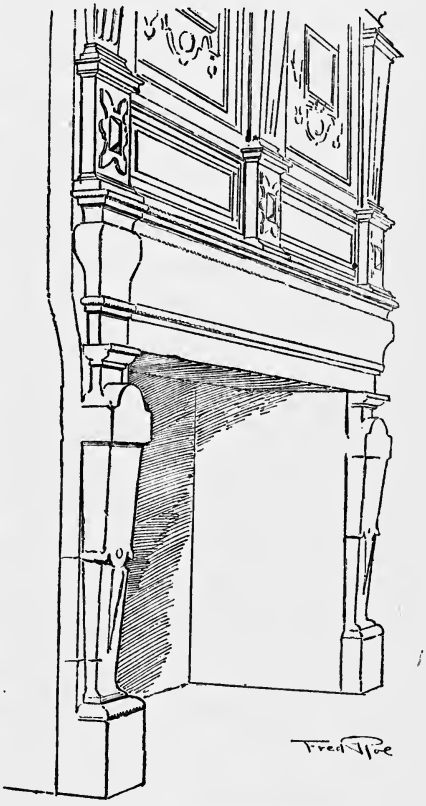
The fireplace is freely carved with the guilloche and vine-leaf, and the painted panels are separated by pairs of detached columns. Similar pairs of columns flank the outside of the overmantel, resting upon fluted pilasters, which constitute the jambs of the fireplace. A legend is current in the vicinity that the interior of this room once formed part of the fittings of Eldred's cabin in the ship in which he sailed round the world. Whether this be true or not, it is a fact that the paintings must have been executed some time after the fireplace was made, for beneath the surface of the paint the indications of geometrical inlay can be seen. The panelling of the room is of plain character, with a frieze of oblong jewel-moulding immediately beneath the cornice. These oblong-shaped projections formed a source of wonder to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and I was assured by one very intelligent old lady that they were supposed to represent sausages which Thomas Eldred and his family had eaten. The room and its fittings are a fair specimen of what, no doubt, might be seen in many of the dwellings of the middle classes of the period.*

* I am informed that this most interesting interior was transported some two years ago to Holywells. Its removal brought to light some curious fresco decoration dating from the time of Henry VIII., a portion of which was saved, and is now exhibited at Christchurch Hall.

A singular feature connected with the panelling of this period, only to be found in the houses of the great and wealthy, was a sort of excrescence jutting out into the room and forming a sort of small lobby, which enclosed the main door of the room, and was itself provided with a door. Some of these lobbies were elaborately sculptured with figures and pinnacles, as at Broughton Castle, Oxfordshire, and Bradfield, Devon. A very excellent example also can be seen incorporated in the inlaid room from Sizergh Castle, Westmorland, which has found a home in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was obviously adopted as a device to add to the comfort of the principal rooms by protecting the inmates against draughts. Large apartments of this period were often provided with a fixed seat running round the whole length of the walls, and supported by numerous pillar legs, and an apartment thus fitted was spoken of in those days as being 'benched aboute,' and in old specifications this term will not infrequently be found. The great hall of Ockwells Manor House supplies a very good instance of an apartment furnished in this manner, while at Crowhurst Place, Surrey, are the remains of a yet earlier example dating from the commencement of the sixteenth century.

During the seventeenth century the oblong top panel still continued to be used when panelling was only carried partly up the wall, but it was seldom decorated with carving. There is little doubt that the custom of wainscotting the principal apartments with

wood continued in some country houses down to a comparatively late date, but there is also evidence that, in accordance with newer ideas, the material, whether solid English oak or imported deal, was subjected to the coats of light paint with which our ancestors were so lavish. The grooved stile was also more in evidence, according with the Dutch traditions which our second Charles brought from Holland.



FIREPLACE FROM LIME STREET, CITY
Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, middle of seventeenth century

The fashion which arose in Wren's time of wainscotting apartments with huge upright classic panels, raised from the surface of the wall, and edged with heavy ogee mouldings, does not belong to the province of this work, for such fittings were mainly composed of materials other than oak. The fireplace, as the seventeenth century progressed, though often possessing a lofty overmantel, became less elaborate and pretentious, its importance as a feature of domestic decoration

being considerably less than that of its Elizabethan prototype.

The fireplaces from Lime Street, which formerly decorated a City merchant's house, and have now been deposited in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are highly interesting examples of the art of an age when merchant princes were content to live over their counting-houses. A very beautiful and characteristic oak mantelpiece of the latter part of the seventeenth century was formerly to be seen in an old house at Deptford, reputed in the neighbourhood to have once formed part of Sayes' Court, the residence of Evelyn, Peter the Great, and Admiral Benbow. This mantelpiece, which is richly carved with the acanthus-leaf in the Corinthian style on two bold members, still exists, though in a somewhat curtailed state, at a house in Steele's Road, Haverstock Hill. It is really astonishing how many fine examples of a date immediately subsequent to the Great Fire of London still remain in out-of-the-way corners in the City of London. To those who wish to study domestic fittings of Charles II.'s reign there is no finer field for investigation than the interiors which still exist in the intricate purlieus of the City.

# CHAPTER XV

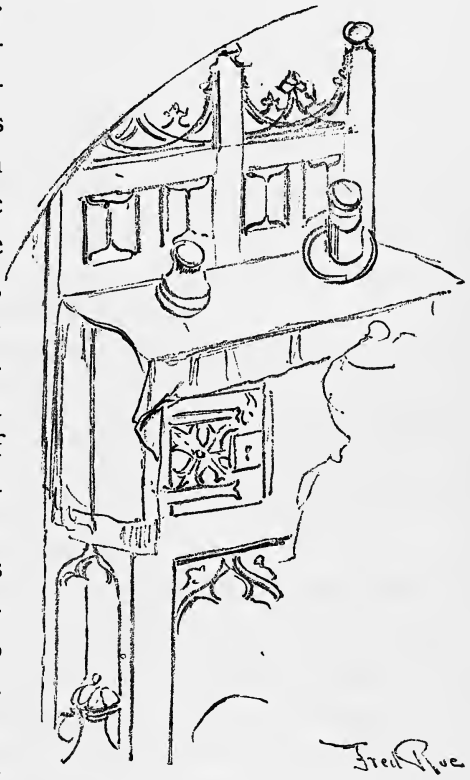
## FOREIGN INFLUENCES

THIS chapter cannot pretend to give more than an outline of the changes of style and construction which have taken place in Continental oak furniture. The subject, if treated at all fully, would suffice to swell out several volumes, and reference can only be made here to some of the prominent features appertaining to countries which were in the most direct communication with England, special attention being paid to certain styles which exercised an immediate influence on our home productions.

Of all European countries, France undoubtedly exhibited the greatest fertility of graceful design and delicacy of handling, Many of the quaint conceits which adorn Continental furniture generally had certainly their origin in France, though trimmings of a different nationality may have been added, which, to use an heraldic term, charged them with a difference. Even the new style of the Renaissance, the pseudo-Greek and Roman, was brought across the Alps by the French and disseminated throughout Europe in its own translated form. It is, therefore, a tribute due to

our Early English craftsman, and one which should not lightly be overlooked, to remember that his individuality in greater part was unaffected by French designs and methods. In the thirteenth century differences between French and English furniture had not asserted themselves to any great extent. The iron-bound coffer in the Hôtel de Carnavalet, in Paris, might be an English production of the same date for aught that can be noted to the contrary. But, when the thirteenth century had closed, a period of three hundred years rolled by in which the line of demarcation between French and English furniture was drawn pretty sharply, and it was not until the advent of the Renaissance, with its classic arcades, its arabesques and dolphins, that any appreciable degree of similarity recurs. During our Perpendicular period architecture reached the very highest limit of technical skill, but even then, while such church fittings as choir stalls and screens were being carried out with the greatest elaboration, domestic, and even monkish, furniture was often crudely constructed and roughly carved. France, on the other hand, produced during the fifteenth century innumerable articles of intricate design, pieced together with excellent joinery. The Flamboyant style, which corresponded in date with our Perpendicular, is, in its way, a sort of secondary Decorated, but, nevertheless, so distinctive in its character that by a connoisseur it can never be mistaken for English work. The few Flamboyant twists which we get on certain of our east coast Gothic

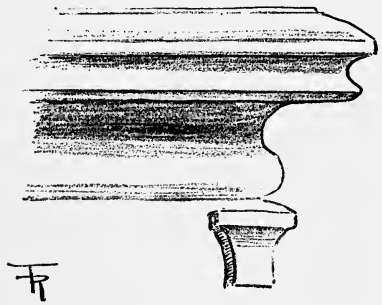
pieces only tend to prove how wide was the difference between the methods of the two countries. Supremely beautiful at its best, the Flamboyant style, towards the close of its reign, frequently degenerated into an excess of floridity. The irritating restlessness of its over-development is clearly exhibited in such late Gothic buildings as the church of St. Maclou, at Rouen, and a precisely similar tendency may be seen in the decoration of furniture. This degeneracy, indeed, has its counterparts in nearly all departments of art; in so many things is perfection the sign, or, at least, the forerunner, of disappearance.



CREDENCE, SCULPTURED ON THE STALLS OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL

It should always be borne in mind, when comparing English and foreign productions of approximate dates, that changes of style were arrived at earlier on the Continent, and in France especially, than in England.

Thus the influence of the Renaissance was manifested in France perhaps a quarter of a century before it took effect in England. In the Cluny and Orleans museums many cabinets and credences may be seen belonging undoubtedly to the close of the fifteenth century, which, had they been made in England, would scarcely have exhibited such unmistakable signs of the new style before the reign of Henry VIII. had advanced some little way. As regards constructive outline, French cupboards and hutches of the time of Francis I. and Henri II. often exhibited a great resemblance to English work of the corresponding periods. The credence, or raised cupboard, with its recessed base, frequently bore a remarkable similarity in structure to its English prototype, but it is in the lighter build, more refined proportions, and differences in such details as mouldings, that the distinction must be looked for.



MOULDED CORNICE ON FRENCH CABINET IN THE PEYRE COLLECTION, SIXTEENTH CENTURY

During the later Renaissance English work was but little affected by French methods, and it is worthy of remark that during the second half of the sixteenth century English work more than held its own. French furniture of a time approximating to our Elizabethan period, although slightly finer in such details as figures, is often lacking in repose; cabinets and buffets were

frequently covered with a superabundance of ornament. A quaint lingering of old Gothic methods continued till a very late period in Brittany, where the Middle Ages lasted longer than in any other part of civilized Europe. Many a chest or food locker decorated with Gothic arches or portraits enclosed in medallions, bearing a fictitiously early look, may be proved on examination to be of Breton origin, and to date no earlier than the close of the seventeenth century. These Breton pieces are almost all coarse in execution and vulgar or grotesque in detail. The Frenchman knows this degenerate work well, and, indeed, the knowledge is not confined to the connoisseur. There is more intelligent appreciation of design at the present day amongst the lower classes in France than elsewhere, the periods being understood by many people in humble station to a surprising degree.

What has been observed as regards French styles and their influence, or otherwise, on English practice is almost equally true of Flemish work, which mainly derived its inspiration from France. The methods of the two Continental countries had much in common, but a certain floridity or grotesqueness of design belongs to Flemish productions, distinguishing them from the purer designs of France. Flemish linen panels, crocketing, and interlaced ornament nearly always exhibit this tendency towards extravagance which, in the case of France, was mostly restricted to the dying Flamboyant. French, and especially Flemish characteristics no doubt had a direct influence upon our east

coast productions, but there are really few English pieces belonging even to the Eastern Counties which cannot be detected as native work owing to their greater boldness, both of design and execution. As regards such early rarities as the so-called tilting-coffers, there is little to distinguish between the specimens existing in Flanders and those to be found in England, but it may be taken for granted that the joinery of the Flemish craftsman in early times was superior to that of his English contemporary. A fine instance of this superiority of technical skill may be seen in one of the ancient municipal coffers now deposited in the Ypres Museum. The structural form of this receptacle, as well as the fashion of the thirteenth-century lancet arches incised upon the lid, is in every way similar to our national work, but a near inspection will discover that the parts of the piece are dovetailed together with the greatest skill and ingenuity. Though several English examples exist which exhibit a somewhat similar form of dovetailing, the nicety of workmanship which characterizes the Flemish coffer is wanting in them.

The full purity of the Gothic style appears never to have been quite grasped by the Dutch, but the Dutch Renaissance exercised an undoubted influence on furniture as well as on architecture in England. But as in France, so in Holland, the change of style preceded by some few years the corresponding change of style in England. The style of the later Dutch Renaissance, which our second Charles brought over from

Holland, is very pronounced and easily recognised. The lines are somewhat heavy, and the decoration is often coarse, a great part of the projecting ornaments, such as jewel knobs or roundels, being merely applied instead of carved out of the solid. The engraving of such inlaid materials as mother-of-pearl and ivory, which were both largely used in the decoration, is also extremely rude, resembling more than anything else the execution of rough wood-cuts of the period. As an illustration of the superficiality of certain specimens of Dutch art of the latter half of the seventeenth century, a cabinet known to the author may be mentioned. In this piece the bottom panels are decorated with an oblong, raised centre plaque, formed of ebonized wood, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory, surrounded by a small fillet of applied moulding. During a recent spring cleaning one of these plaques became loose and fell out, exposing to view what was probably the original decoration in the shape of an inlaid plaque of bone, engraved with the name of the first possessor of the cabinet. This alteration—something in the nature of a palimpsest—had evidently been effected at a date very little subsequent to the construction of the piece.

This accidentally-discovered instance shows how the Dutch art of the period was characterized by much rough-and-ready superficiality. Such examples are often beautiful in their colouring, and interesting as specimens of genuine antiques, but are deplorably lacking in the higher elements of art.

There is but little to say regarding the influence of

German art upon English furniture. The floridity of German architectural types had no effect whatever upon English decoration, though in certain matters of ornament English detail was visibly affected. The German emblazonment of heraldry and the disposition of such features as the lambrequin found a certain amount of imitation in our own country, while in one species of decoration certainly our wood-carvers borrowed largely from the Teuton. I refer to what is known by some as the *parchemin* panel. It is not known in what country this particular form of decoration was evolved, but it is found more frequently in Germany and the Low Countries than anywhere else. Specimens of this type that we find in England approximate in appearance more nearly to those just mentioned than to those existing in France. Very often German and Low Flemish types of this decoration err on the side of floridity, but they very seldom possessed the debased vulgarity to be found in some of the latest types of linen panelling. In spite of all that has been said as to the leadership of France as regards wealth of design, it is probable that the *parchemin* panel was the product of German fancy.

It is only necessary to treat briefly here as to the influence of Italian art upon England and its revolutionizing consequences. Bonaffe says that 'among the Italians the art of wood consists in disguising it, among the French, of making it prominent'; and this is no doubt true respecting the painted decoration of early pieces of furniture. In the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, when the Italian *cassone* was elaborately and deeply carved, this remark would hardly apply. Italian art, as seen through the medium of the French conquerors, was eventually responsible for the bold caryatides and projecting mouldings on our Elizabethan furniture. Yet, with all that we derived from Italian sources, English classic wood-carving possessed an individuality—of roughness, it may be, but individuality still—which is hardly to be mistaken. The screen in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, with all its tremendous effects of light and shade, combined with delicacy of detail, is totally unlike anything achieved by our native craftsmen. The projecting portrait heads, thrusting themselves forward from the panel, as in many of our English-made chests of the time, are as distinct in their individuality as the fine scrollwork and arabesques which adorn this magnificent structure. French decoration of this character often approximated very nearly in nicety of execution to the Italian models; and this was especially the case towards the South of France, where the influence was naturally strongest. At no period during the Renaissance, however, could our English scrollwork and arabesques vie with the Italian in delicacy and refinement, though our imitations of Italian designs often approached the originals very closely.

During the sixteenth century a vast quantity of furniture was produced in Italy, decorated with what is technically known as pokerwork—that is, with designs lightly incised in outline on the flat surface

of the wood, certain shades or colourings being produced by the application of a hot iron. The ground is, furthermore, in some cases covered with a sort of cross-hatch pattern, to insure greater relief to such figures as appear on it. Coffers thus decorated are often of very large size, and are by no means rare. The designs are frequently of a gross or voluptuous character, and not too well drawn, but it is fair to say that some very fine specimens are occasionally to be found. The author well remembers seeing a remarkably beautiful example in Suffolk some years ago, in which the front was decorated with a representation of a troop of soldiers, armed with halberds and carrying standards, marching in front of a walled and fortified town. The costumes were of the *lanzknecht* order, with puffed and jagged sleeves and broad-toed shoes, such as one sees in Albrecht Dürer's wood-cuts. The piece seemed to have originated in the North of Italy about the commencement of the sixteenth century. Secretaires and cabinets, ornamented in the manner described, were freely imported into England during the latter part of the sixteenth century, and, oddly enough, fitted with home-made stands or substructures of purely national design. In such pieces the contrast between the English pseudo-classic and the veritable Italian design can be studied with remarkable advantage. The introduction of these Italian goods led to our English craftsmen taking up the same method of decoration which they freely employed on cypress or camphor wood chests during the reign of Charles I.

and later, the royal arms and supporters being the favourite device adopted. To Italy, directly or indirectly, England, with the rest of Europe, owed the classical element which practically revolutionized the decorative arts in the sixteenth century, but, notwithstanding this, English individuality, manifesting itself in the valuable qualities of boldness and freedom of handling, has always remained to distinguish our work from that of the Continental artist and craftsman.

Little enough has been written or said about Scandinavian influence and its effects on English design. That such influence should be exercised during what we may term the 'Dark Ages' is not to be wondered at, or even that a recurrence took place during the thirteenth century, the latter being, in fact, a veritable after-math of the Viking times. Later indications of Scandinavian influence are more difficult to explain. It is a fact, nevertheless, that this recurrence of Scandinavian decoration cropped up again in England during both the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. There is but little difference between the patterns employed during all these periods, whorls and intricate geometrical patterns, often of a fan shape, or composed of intersecting circles, being the forms employed.

During the seventeenth century a vast number of small boxes incised with this species of decoration were found in the English market, the design of which was almost identical with the wheels carved on that undoubtedly English coffer of the thirteenth century

in Stoke d'Abernon Church, Surrey. Some people who are conversant with this species of decoration on early English coffers commit the very easy error of assigning these later boxes to a date contemporary with the earlier specimens. The date of their origin can without difficulty be detected by the lightness of their material, by the utter want of rest caused by the repetition of the designs, which frequently cover the whole surface of the wood, and by the dovetailing by which the parts are joined. Whatever may be the causes which led to the periodical resuscitation of this Scandinavian influence, it may be taken for granted that the well-known conservatism of Scandinavian design was responsible in itself for the striking repetition in the character of the designs.

How widespread the influence was may be judged by the fact that considerable traces of it are to be found as far south even as Spain. From the liberality with which the later examples were decorated, the design assumed a monotonous appearance, and they do not appeal very strongly to critical collectors.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OLD FURNITURE WITH HIDING-PLACES

EVERY now and then one is startled by reading in the newspapers some sensational account of how a hoard of coins or other valuables has been discovered in some oak chest or bureau which has been purchased at an auction for the proverbial 'mere song.' Many of these stories of 'finds' are grossly exaggerated, but those which are substantially true point to what was, no doubt, a very common practice in bygone times, for, obviously, before the bank system came into vogue the practice of concealing sums of money in pieces of furniture and odd corners would be a very natural proceeding. That some of these hoards should only come to light in these latter days is hardly to be wondered at, when we remember how frequently the original depositors may have had their existence prematurely cut short in times when life and property were anything but secure, and how often memory fails with those who live to a ripe age.

One of the most startling finds of this description occurred many years ago, but the fact of the discovery itself is very well substantiated, though collateral

details require sifting. In the early part of last century there existed in the town of Leicester a tottering old Gothic inn, which went by the name of the Blue Boar. This interesting old hostel, which was, unfortunately, pulled down in the thirties to make room for a row of tenements, was closely connected with one of the most remarkable and momentous episodes in English history. In the latter part of the fifteenth century Leicester Castle had become ruinous and uninhabitable, and Richard III., when on his way to try conclusions with the Duke of Richmond on Bosworth Field, slept at this inn, which was at that time the principal one in the town. The King occupied a large, gloomy chamber, whose beams bore conventional representations of vine-tendrils executed in vermilion, which could still be seen when the old building was pulled down.

More than a hundred years afterwards, in Elizabeth's reign, a man of the name of Clark, who kept the hotel, which by this time had considerably declined in importance, suddenly, and without any apparent cause, rose from his obscure position to one of comparative affluence, attaining, amongst other things, to the office of Mayor of the borough. The man kept his counsel well, but the truth at length leaked out that his wife, 'going to make a bed hastily and jumbling the bedstead, a piece of gold dropped out.' This excited the woman's curiosity; she narrowly examined the piece of furniture, and, finding that it had a double bottom, took off the uppermost with a chisel, upon which she discovered the space between them filled

with gold, part of it coined during the reign of Richard III., and the rest in earlier times.*

Not many years after the occurrence Clark died, leaving considerable wealth to his widow, who continued to keep the hostelry. In the year 1613 Mistress Clark was treacherously murdered by her maid-servant, whilst seven male accomplices searched for the treasure, strange stories of which had circulated throughout the neighbourhood. The miscreants, it is satisfactory to relate, paid the penalty of their crimes with death. A huge oak bedstead which stood in the room in which the King passed the night was formerly credited with being the actual piece of furniture in which this remarkable discovery was made. The bedstead now stands in Beaumanor, but, unfortunately, here the chain of evidence is broken, for the piece of furniture itself is certainly not earlier than the reign of Elizabeth. The authority who collected the accounts of the discovery and its grim sequel further adds: 'After this the bedstead came into the hands of a servant of that inn, and before it came into the hands of Mr. Alderman Drake it had been many years in the Red Cross Street, where it had been cut to make it fit for a low room.

'The feet, which were cut off, were 2 feet 6 inches long and each 6 inches square. The present feet are modern. It is not probable that the King would carry such a bedstead about with him, but it seems more

* Sir Roger Twysden's account in the 'History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester,' by John Nichols, F.S.A., 1815.

likely that he was put on the best bed in the house, and that the money was secreted in some convenient and obscure part of the bedstead till his return after the battle; or, in the hurry of the preparation next morning, it might be forgotten.' Now for the probable truth. The bedstead at Beaumanor was doubtless 'the best bed in the house,' but, as I have said, from its style of construction and carving, it certainly dates back no further than Elizabeth's reign. The piece, therefore, was probably made for the house after Mr. Clark's accession of wealth; and the fact that Mistress Clark was murdered upon it caused the connection between this Elizabethan bedstead and the story of the discovery of the treasure.

But how about the earlier bedstead in which the treasure was secreted? Monarchs of the Plantagenet period, who were accustomed to carry about with them on their journeys such things as chairs and even window casements, would hardly undertake to transport so cumbrous a piece of furniture as a four-poster bedstead, especially when engaged on so perilous a mission as that which led Richard to press forward towards his encounter with Richmond. That picturesque and beautiful, but occasionally inaccurate, historian, Agnes Strickland, in an expression which she uses referring to the circumstance, touches more nearly perhaps on the truth than any other writer: 'Richard occupied a ghostly Gothic chamber; he slept on his military chest, in the shape of a bedstead.'*

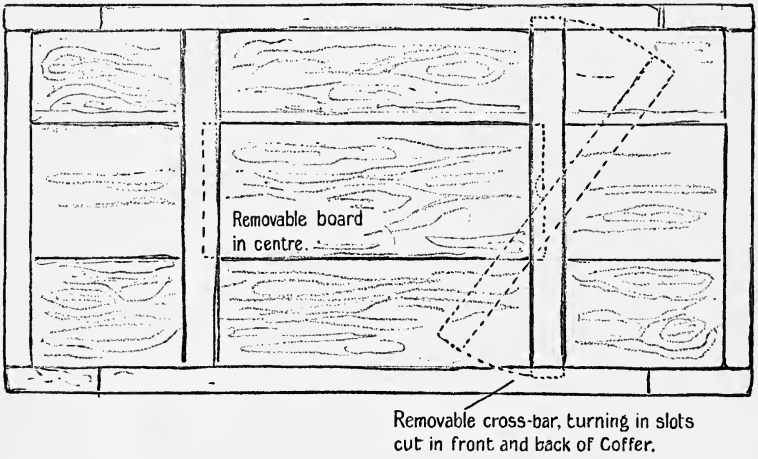
* 'Lives of the Queens of England: Reign of Elizabeth of York,' by Agnes Strickland.

As I have said, an examination of medieval missal paintings and illustrations will often show that chests were used for the purpose of sleeping upon. Richard would hardly travel without his military chest, and as the tyrant's coffers were impoverished, it seems very likely that he would keep it closely attached to his person as long as he felt he could with safety do so. The military chest may have been slept upon by King Richard, and was doubtless left behind at the Blue Boar, in Leicester Town, his last stopping-place before the conflict. The guard which remained behind, with this and other impedimenta in their charge, either absconded at the astounding news of Richard's defeat and death, or were slaughtered, and the chest remained at the inn, unclaimed, its richer booty beneath the false bottom lying unsuspected till Mistress Clark's 'jumbling' revealed its secret.

At Newport Church, in Essex, may still be seen a very ancient ecclesiastical coffer, which possesses a hiding-place in full working order. The coffer is an enormous and weighty piece of construction, clamped with bands of iron, and carved on its front with shields, from which the painted heraldic devices have now disappeared. Inside the lid are some very remarkable paintings in oil, depicting our Saviour on the cross and the four Evangelists. The bottom of the coffer appears at first sight to be formed of horizontal planks of oak, strengthened at equal distances by two stout oak transom bars. A further inspection reveals that one of the transoms can be removed and a section of

the centre plank slipped out, disclosing a space of some 2 or 3 inches in depth, now, alas! empty. The device and mechanism of this piece of deception are so purely simple and clever that it would be difficult, indeed, to discover, without some indication were afforded by those who have inherited the secret.

Coming down to later times, a majority of the old secretaires appear to have possessed some form of

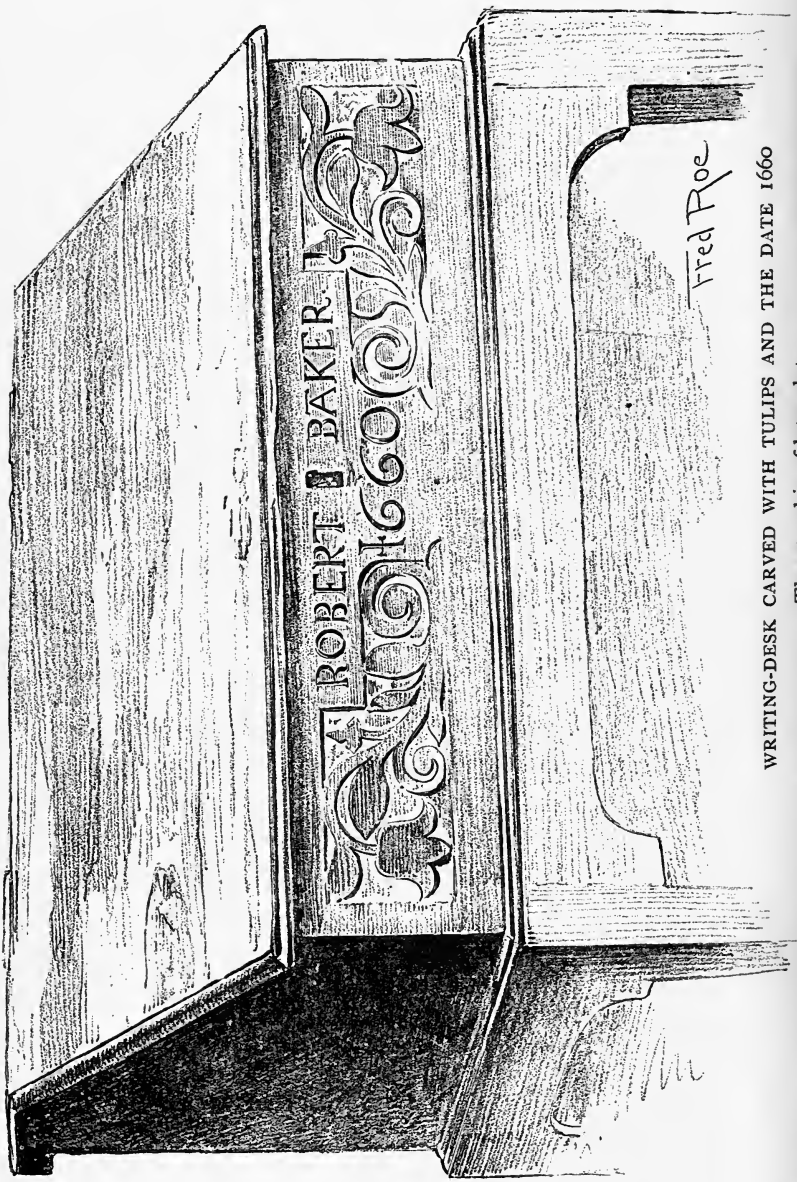



MECHANISM OF HIDING-PLACE IN THE NEWPORT COFFER, ESSEX

hiding-place, this mostly being a space at the back of the pigeon-holes. Some acquaintances of mine, after having possessed an oak secretaire for many years, accidentally became enlightened as to the peculiarities of its structure. In a space similar to that which has been described were found two miniature paintings, one evidently representing Prince Charles Edward, the young Pretender, and the other an unknown young lady.

In a well-known collection is an oak desk, carved with the conventional representation of the tulip—a form of decoration, needless to say, brought over from Holland by the 'Merry Monarch.' It is likewise incised with the date '1660' and the name 'ROBERT BAKER,' and contains no less than seven hiding-places, several of them being very artfully contrived. It may be mentioned that this desk originally came from the vicinity of Stratford-on-Avon, and may have been made for that family of Baker which was connected with the Hathaways of Shottery. Ann Hathaway's cottage, before being purchased by the Government, was kept by a Mrs. Baker, a descendant of the old stock; and the pride with which the old lady was wont to show the fine Elizabethan carved oak bedstead, which tradition says William Shakespeare presented to the Hathaway family, as well as other objects of interest associated with the family, will no doubt be recollected by many.

One of the most usual places for the concealment of money and valuables during the reign of Elizabeth was a recess formed by hollowing out the legs of bedsteads, and providing them with a close-fitting door. This device was of such frequent occurrence that it must ultimately have lost the quality of secrecy, which probably accounts for our not finding it in bedsteads of a rather late date. The celebrated bedstead from Turton Tower has a hiding-place of this description. This example, dated 1593, and carved with the arms of the Courtenays of Devon, is now deposited




WRITING-DESK CARVED WITH TULIPS AND THE DATE 1660
The stand is of later date

in the Bethnal Green Museum. It is only fair to state that this latter specimen has been much restored, though doubtless in conformity with the original design, as far as the secret recess is concerned. A bedstead with a recess of a different description is in the possession of Mr. Dyer Edwards, of Prinknash Park, Gloucestershire. A narrow longitudinal recess runs through the panelled tester at a point just above the pillows, and may possibly have been designed to contain weapons of defence, for the space—at any rate, till quite recently—was utilized for the reception of a sword and dagger.

In 'The Antiquarian and Topographical Cabinet,' published in 1809, we find the following interesting anecdote incorporated in an account of Glastonbury Cross :

'In the place of the porter's lodge was erected a good dwelling-house, the owner of which, in the last century, pulled down an old mantelpiece, and placed it in the street, where it lay for several years. He was once offered three shillings for it, but his price being three shillings and fourpence, the bargain was declined; at length his daughter, having occasion to build a small chamber, directed the mantelpiece to be sawed into pieces for stairs, when, in a private hole, which had been purposely made in it, was found near a hundred pieces of gold, of the time of Richard II. and Edward III., of the value of about eleven shillings each.'

Some few years ago a curious chest of drawers was

discovered buried amongst a miscellaneous collection of lumber in St. Chad's Chapel in Lichfield Cathedral; the piece was with some difficulty saved from being broken up, as it was at the time in an excessively dirty and neglected state. The front is incised with the date 1663, and each drawer is also carved with an initial. What this highly-interesting article of furniture could have been intended for is not very obvious; the fact remains that it possesses several secret drawers concealed in a simple but ingenious manner.

A friend of mine recently purchased a cabinet or nest of drawers elevated on turned legs, probably of the time of William and Mary, which, on examination, was found to contain no fewer than seventeen different hiding-places. Yet another friend, after an expenditure of much time and trouble, discovered a secret recess in a piece of furniture which had been bequeathed to him, only to find that its contents consisted of 'one brass farthing.'

## CHAPTER XVII

### SOME VICISSITUDES OF OLD FURNITURE

THE Baron de Cosson, the well-known authority on arms and armour, in his book on helmets and mail,* makes the following pithy remark :

'This . . . was a most impudent forgery, and it would seem, from an observation of many of the numerous forgeries that have appeared in this country during the last thirty years, that, as a rule, the more impudent the forgery, the more circumstantial was the story with which it made its appearance.'

This comment in general as to histories attached to armour certainly very often applies to ancient furniture, but with this difference: that while very few pieces of armour that come into the market have any history worth noting, many specimens of furniture, on the other hand, may be found with histories which may be regarded as authentic. The reason for this may perhaps be as follows: Gothic and Jacobean furniture, although thoroughly out of fashion in Georgian times,

* 'Ancient Helmets and Examples of Mail: A Catalogue of the Objects exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Archæological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, June 3 to 16, 1880.'

still continued to be used to some extent for practical purposes, whereas armour, since the introduction of firearms, ceased to have any practical purpose at all, and, from want of use, its history gradually became forgotten. However, these records do not always bear investigation, even when the piece of furniture in itself is absolutely genuine, and has stood in the place for which it was made for many generations. For example, the number of bedsteads in old Tudor houses in which Queen Elizabeth is said to have slept is really remarkable, but in most cases the bedsteads themselves belong to a period long subsequent to her time. In more than one instance the initials 'E.R.' are actually visible upon the ceiling of the room; but while the hangings of the bed which it contains might possibly be assigned to the Elizabethan period, the bedstead itself certainly does not belong to a date anterior to that of Queen Anne.

One of the best authenticated records of which I know where a piece of furniture has left the place with which its early history is connected is attached to a chair in my own possession. The chair in question is a leather backed and seated production of the seventeenth century with a spiral rail in front, which might date from the reign of Charles II. It was one of three which formerly stood on the daïs in the Assize Hall of Taunton Castle, and which were actually used by the Court over which the notorious Judge Jeffreys presided at the Bloody Assize in 1685. Not many years ago Taunton Castle was turned into

a museum, in which the usual collection of savages' weapons and other familiar curios were placed. This chair and some other local relics, instead of being treasured with the greatest care, were sold and dispersed. The Jeffreys' chair, as I shall call it, passed into the possession of a lady, who, on her part, presented it to a gentleman whose family were associated with the borough, and he, in his turn, knowing my fondness for such antiquities, made it over to me, and it now remains one of my best-treasured possessions.

Richard Kilburne, of Hawkhurst, and a master of Staple Inn, was a member of a very old Kentish family, who wrote, amongst other works, the Survey of the County of Kent, which is still sought after and referred to as an authority.* He was born in 1605, and in the year 1631, at the age of twenty-six, he became possessed of the mansion known as 'Fowlers,' in the above-named village, 'God's providence having there left him an inheritance.' It was doubtless in the possession of his father and grandfather, as the 'coat of arms belonging to the family apparently long previous to his day was granted to the Kilburnes of Hawkhurst and London.'† Richard Kilburne died in 1678, the term of his residence at 'Fowlers' having

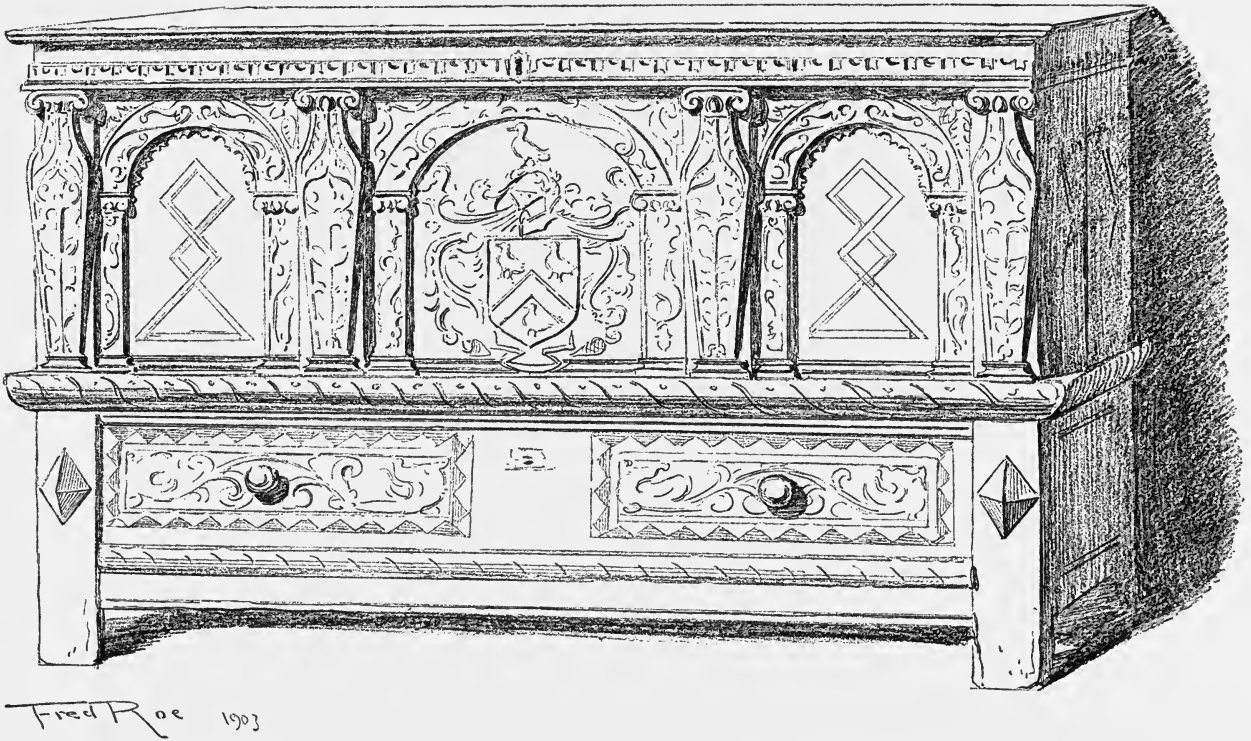
* 'A Topographie, or Survey, of the County of Kent, with some Chronological, Historical, and other Matters touching the same, and the several Parishes therein, by Richard Kilburne, of Hawkhurst, Esquire. Printed by Thos. Mabb for Henry Atkinson, and are to be sold at his shop at Staple Inn Gate in Holborne. 1659.'

† 'The Antiquities and History of the Name and Family of Kilbourne, in its varied Orthography,' Newhaven, U.S.A., 1856.

extended to about twenty-eight years. For some reason or other, unexplained, when he vacated the mansion, he left behind him an elaborately-carved piece of furniture, in the shape of a linen-chest with a long drawer under, having its centre panel decorated with the family arms: 'On a field argent, a chevron azure between three bald coots sable, heads argent and beaks tawny. Crest: A bald coot proper.'*

As years passed by several families inhabited the old Jacobean residence known as 'Fowlers,' but about the middle of the last century the attention of Mr. Goodwin Kilburne, Principal of Tudor Hall Academy, and a descendant of the Kentish topographer, was directed to the chest, which had remained in the house as a stock piece of furniture since the first half of the seventeenth century. Sir Edmund Hardinge, who then inhabited the mansion, presented the relic to Mr. Goodwin Kilburne, and it now remains in the possession of his son, Mr. G. G. Kilburne, R.I., the well-known water-colour painter, thus affording an excessively rare instance of a piece of furniture which has returned to the family for whom it was undoubtedly made after the lapse of some two hundred years. The features are the Kilburne arms before mentioned, surmounted by a helmet and lambrequin, four terminal pilasters, and conventional representations of dragons on the uprights and panels of the drawer. It will be noticed that the conventional Gothic flowering, so prevalent about the juncture of the fifteenth and sixteenth

* Edmonson's 'Heraldry.'




CHEST CARVED WITH THE ARMS OF RICHARD KILBURNE, OF HAWKHURST, AND NOW OWNED BY G. G. KILBURNE, ESQ., R.I., MIDDLE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

centuries, has here degenerated into a queer-shaped object, something resembling a pine-cone, which may be seen towards the bottom of the centre panel on each side of the shield.

Apropos of the case just related, the importance of heraldry may opportunely be referred to. The marvellous value of this science in tracing pedigrees is well known, and can scarcely be overestimated. Ockwells with, and Ockwells deprived of, its splendid heraldic glass as it existed only a few years ago is an admirable object-lesson.*

In Shakespeare's 'Richard II.,' Bolingbroke's speech to his two prisoners, Bushy and Green, shows fairly the anxiety for the preservation of family devices as a feature in domestic decoration :

> 'While you have . . . . . .
> From mine own windows torn my household coat,
> Razed out my impress, leaving me no sign,
> Save men's opinions and my living blood,
> To show the world I am a gentleman.
> This . . . . . .
> Condemns you to the death.'†

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* Ockwells' Manor House, near Bray, Berkshire, during the eighties had fallen into such a neglected and degraded condition that its destruction was imminent. The history of the building seemed lost, or nearly so, but fortunately the property fell into the hands of a keen lover of antiquities, and the magnificent series of stained-glass windows, replete with heraldic designs, were with some difficulty recovered and restored to their proper positions in the banqueting-hall. These devices have been instrumental in indicating the families formerly connected with the estate.

† 'Richard II.,' Act III., Scene 1.

Hedingham Castle, in Essex, was built in the eleventh century by Aubrey de Vere, Earl of Oxford, whose descendants resided there till the end of the sixteenth century. A very few years ago a local dealer discovered in the vicinity a large oak cupboard, which he promptly acquired for trading purposes. This cupboard, when cleaned, was purchased by Mr. J. Majendie, M.P., the present owner of the castle, who has placed it in the great hall with some other antiquities. It is a heavy Gothic piece of furniture dating from the time of Henry VII., or early in the reign of Henry VIII., surmounted with a curious embattled moulding about its top, and linen panels alternating with tracery enclosed in Gothic spandrels, but its chief interest lies in the fact that, centred in the roundels of tracery carved on its doors, may be seen thrice repeated the mullet, the ancient device of the De Veres. This old Gothic cupboard, after strange vicissitudes, has evidently come back to its original home.*

Some exceedingly interesting iron-bound coffers remain in the chapel of the Pyx at Westminster, the ancient Treasury of England's Kings. These strong-

* It was at Castle Hedingham that Henry VII. administered his historic rebuke to his Great Chamberlain, the thirteenth Earl of Oxford: 'My lord, I have heard much of your hospitality, but I see that it is greater than the speech. . . . I thank you for my good cheer; but I may not endure to have my laws broken in my sight. My attorney must speak to you.' The cupboard in question may possibly have been in the banqueting-hall at the time of this incident.

boxes are said to have been the receptacles for both the Saxon regalia and the treasure of Edward I., and to have been plundered in that disgraceful case of monkish burglary known as the 'Great Robbery,' which occurred in April, 1303. There is reason to doubt such a high antiquity for these coffers, but they may have been used to contain the regalia of a later date.

As regards the ancient receptacle of the regalia of Scotland, an interesting anecdote appears in Lockhart's 'Life of Sir Walter Scott.' The great novelist's letters, containing their most graphic and picturesque accounts of the bringing to light of the relics of the royal house of Scotland, are so vivid in their reality that we can almost see the scene as if we were actual spectators of it:

'There has an odd mystery hung about the fate of these royal symbols of national independence. The spirit of the Scotch at the Union clung fondly to these emblems; and to soothe their jealousy it was specially provided by an article of the Union that the regalia should never be removed, under any pretext, from the kingdom of Scotland. Accordingly, they were deposited with much ceremony, as an authentic instrument bears, in a strong chest, secured by many locks, and the chest itself placed in a strong-room, which, again, was carefully bolted up and secured, leaving to national pride the satisfaction of pointing to the barred window with the consciousness that there lay the regalia of Scotland. But this gratification was strangely

qualified by a surmise, which somehow became generally averred, stating that the regalia had been sent to London ; and you may remember that we saw at the Jewel Office a crown, *said to be* the ancient crown of Scotland. If this transfer (by the way, highly illegal) was ever made, it must have been under some secret warrant, for no authority can be traced for such a proceeding in the records of the Secretary of State's office. Fifteen or twenty years ago the Crown-room, as it is called, was opened by certain Commissioners, under authority of a sign-manual. They saw the fatal chest, strewed with the dust of an hundred years, about 6 inches thick ; a coating of like thickness lay on the floor ; and I have heard the late President Blair say that the uniform and level appearance of the dust warranted them to believe that the chest, if opened at all after 1707, must have been violated within a short time of that date, since, had it been opened at a later period, the dust accumulated on the lid, and displaced at opening it, must have been lying around the chest. But the Commissioners did not think that their warrant entitled them to force this chest, for which no keys could be found, especially as their warrant only entitled them to search for records—not for crowns and sceptres.'*

And again :

'The extreme solemnity of opening sealed doors of oak and iron, and finally breaking open a chest which

* Letter to J. B. S. Merritt, Esq., M.P., Rokeby. Edinburgh, January 14, 1818.

had been shut since March 7, 1707, about a hundred and eleven years, gave a sort of interest to our researches which I can hardly express to you, and it would be very difficult to describe the intense eagerness with which we watched the rising of the lid of the chest, and the progress of the workmen in breaking it open, which was neither an easy nor a speedy task. It sounded very hollow when they worked on it with their tools, and I began to lean to your faction of the Little Faiths.'*

It turned out, however, that the Little Faiths were wrong. The completion of the workmen's task showed the regalia in its ancient resting-place—a cause of infinite satisfaction, if not actual inspiration, to the great novelist.

A friend of mine, while travelling in Suffolk, was taken by the vicar of a small parish into a cottage where stood an elaborately-carved sideboard, with its doors hinged on with leathern bands and straps of string. It was thickly covered with paint, but it had evidently at one time been a fine piece, and its decorative qualities induced my friend to purchase it. The acquisition of the cupboard was supplemented by the information that it came from 't'owd hall when squire was sold up in grandfather's time and was kep' in remembrance of squire.' It was not noticed at the time of purchase, but an after-examination discovered some oblong depressions in the plain surface of the

* Letter to J. W. Croker, Esq., M.P., etc., Admiralty, London. Edinburgh, February 4, 1818.

wood suggestive of the disappearance of inlay. An expert restorer was set to work to 'pickle' the cupboard. The removal of the first coat of chocolate paint revealed a layer of blue, which in its turn gave place to white, and so on. In all six coats of paint of various hues were removed, with the result that a magnificently-carved and inlaid cupboard of true Elizabethan character was laid bare. I may add that this process of 'stripping,' as it is termed, cost the purchaser at least four times what he expended on the purchase of the article. Very few, indeed, of the original pieces of inlay were missing.

Some fifteenth-century panels of Flamboyant design that I know of, and carved with the shields bearing the arms of France Modern and a collateral branch of the royal house, were discovered by an architect doing duty as doors of a rabbit-hutch. These panels, two of which bear indications of supporting a lock, had evidently formed part of a chest of fifteenth-century work which had once been one of the finest of its kind in France. It would not be impossible to reconstruct the entire chest from these fragments by careful reference to the many similar and complete examples remaining in some of the French museums.

The degraded state to which fine specimens of antique furniture can descend may be instanced by reference to the magnificent, but deplorably ruinous, collection at Rye House. The old red-brick gate-house of the mansion which formerly stood there is still in existence, and in it are gathered together a

most wonderful collection of miscellaneous antiquities, tapestry, jack-boots, Elizabethan and Jacobean cabinets of rare form, in the last stage to which damp, dilapidation, worm and moth could possibly bring them short of utter ruin.

A perhaps unique relic of seventeenth-century domestic economy may be seen there in the shape of a large board painted with a very precise set of regulations respecting decorum and behaviour in the servants' hall. The whole collection exhibits a sad instance of the strange vicissitudes through which furniture which once did duty in the great halls of the country can pass.

In the summer of 1890 I was enjoying, with two friends, a short visit to one of the least-explored parts of Surrey, when, calling at a solitary wayside cottage in the hope of getting refreshment, I noticed through the half-open door a finely-designed Court cupboard of large dimensions. The cottage was verging on dilapidation, and the ceiling of the living-room had sagged so much that its cross-beam actually rested on the top of the cupboard, which was manifestly breaking down under the pressure. I attempted to open negotiations for the purchase of this ill-used relic, but without effect. The woman did not value it, but her reason for declining to part with the cupboard was that, 'if once removed, the house might fall down.'

There is little doubt that the removal of furniture of this description to mean cottages for which it was never intended mainly occurred during the Georgian

period. Mahogany and painted white wood furniture was then in vogue; indeed, to such a point did this change in taste advance that many of our most precious pieces of carved oak were carefully covered with successive coats of white or 'duck's-egg' colour in order to follow the fashion. Those who could afford to have a complete outfit of the new style of furniture had it, dispersing their despised oak. Those, on the other hand, who could not supplied the need as best might be with the assistance of the paint-pot.

Somewhere in the fifties, a brother artist was visiting, with a party of friends, the village of Bracciano, near Rome. The ancient castle at this place, which at that time resembled in some ways the Tower of London, with six flanking towers, is celebrated as the place which Sir Walter Scott, when visiting the Eternal City, was especially desirous of seeing, as a romantic survival of medievalism thoroughly in accordance with his tastes.* Immediately preceding the arrival of my artist friend, who travelled the road some twenty years after Scott, a most dramatic discovery had been made, bringing to mind the well-known incident of the same nature which occurred at Minster Lovell, in Oxfordshire, early in the eighteenth century. The workmen

* 'He was struck with the sombre appearance of the Gothic towers, built with the black lava which had once formed the pavement of the Roman road, and which adds much to its frowning magnificence. In the interior he could not but be pleased with the grand suite of state apartments, all yet habitable, and even retaining in some rooms the old furniture and the rich silk hangings of the Orsini and Odescalchi.'—Lockhart's 'Life of Scott.'

who were employed in pulling down a portion of the castle of Bracciano came unawares upon a secret chamber in which was sitting the figure of a man clothed in an antique medieval costume with his head reclining upon an ancient worm-eaten table. The chamber had been completely walled up with the exception of a very small 'squint,' or narrow aperture, which, however, was filled with thick, coarse glass.

Upon the breach being made in the wall by which the workmen entered, a rush of air into this dismal prison chamber caused the rapid disintegration of the figure, which collapsed into a heap of dust mingled with fragments of metal constituting the equipments of his costume. My friend, unfortunately, did not arrive in time to see the actual appearance of this victim of medieval barbarity, but the table, as well as the buttons, buckles, and mountings of his dagger-sheath were all in evidence.

This table, discovered at a time when the knowledge of, and taste for, such antiquities very rarely existed, was doubtless destroyed; but what interest would now attach to a memento with such a history, even apart from its immense antiquarian value!

The brutal indifference which our Georgian ancestors manifested towards furniture of an earlier date cannot better be instanced than by the treatment of the contents of the two finest specimens of medieval fortified dwellings in the Midlands—Haddon Hall and Compton Wynyates to wit. Until within recent years Compton Wynyates, the historic mansion of the Earl

of Northampton, remained a mere shell, and the description of its desolate condition given by Howitt is sufficiently pathetic.* From Brewer, writing about 1814, we learn that this venerable seat was not at that time used by the then Earl as a residence. He adds: 'The old furniture, pregnant with allusions to former story, was sold by auction during the life of the late Earl. Among the articles was a carved and gilt bedstead, on which, it is said, Henry VIII. reposed when on a visit to the loyal and approved companion of his youth!'†

The fate of much of the contents of Haddon Hall is still more deplorable. The place was abandoned as a residence by the Duke of Rutland in favour of Belvoir Castle about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Such of the furniture as was then thought valuable, and corresponded with the taste of the times, was removed to the Lincolnshire mansion, and 'that which was not wanted was lodged in a barn on the north side of the hall, one end of which extended into what is provincially called "a by-water," being a branch of the river Wye. The whole quantity consigned to this miserable repository amounted to ten waggon-loads. Here the furniture was kept, till the moisture, arising from floods and rain, reduced the woodwork to a state of rottenness and decay, and then it was ordered to be used for fuel. Fifteen bedsteads were put into a long room near the house,

* 'Visits to Remarkable Places,' by William Howitt. Longmans, 1840.

† 'Beauties of England and Wales,' 1814.

which had been a granary, and after being left for a time to fall in pieces, they likewise were ordered to be cut up and burnt.'* Who can say what treasures beyond value were consumed in this astonishing holocaust? Reading between the lines, it is pretty evident that the oldest and rarest pieces perished in this tragedy of water and fire. The rest of this deplorable story is thus told by Rayner:

'The neglect and consequent destruction to which these relics of antiquity were thus consigned may be imputed to the person who was then agent to the Duke of Rutland, and who made this unfortunate use of the discretionary power with which, it may be presumed, he was entrusted by his noble employer. This agent, also, when the old building required slating, contrived to raise the requisite funds, or a part of them, by disposing of such *useless lumber* (as he no doubt considered it) as was not fit for fuel.'

Amongst other articles which disappeared at this time were 'some singular curtain-rods and carved bed-posts, having "knobs" in the middle, richly carved, a foot and a half in diameter.' There is no doubt, from this description, that the latter relics were part of a magnificent Elizabethan bedstead.

Instances of the degradation of fine pieces of furniture are unfortunately only too numerous. A former Vicar of Badwell Ash, in Suffolk, some few years ago, when first entering the parish, discovered that a pig-stye in the vicinity of his vicarage was composed of

* Rayner's 'History and Antiquities of Haddon Hall,' 1839.

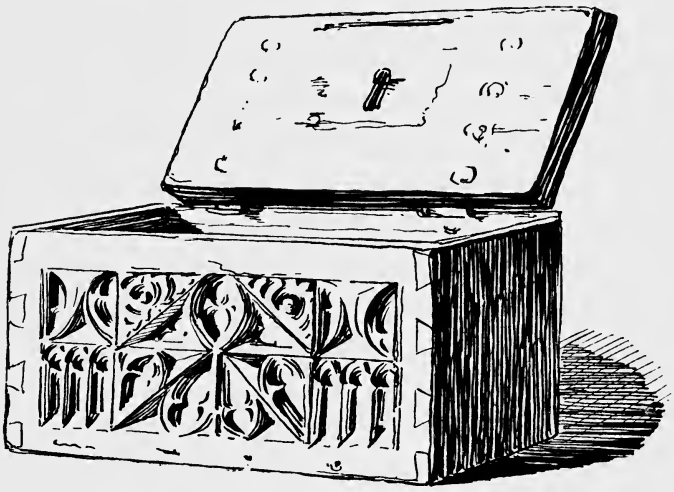
Elizabethan oak panelling, elaborately carved with the strap and jewel ornament. The writer, whilst collecting materials for this work, saw a timber outhouse in an outlying part of Essex, which was repaired with antique shutters or doors from a press furnished with iron hinges. It is due, however, to our own generation to say that it does not stand alone in the perpetration of these acts of vandalism. In corroboration of this, I may mention the picture by Teniers (No. 862) in the National Gallery, entitled 'The Surprise.' A couple are interrupted in an amorous conversation by an indignant vrou, who is entering through the door of the wretched shed in which the scene takes place. This building appears to be a lumber-house for miscellaneous rubbish, and is no doubt a true portrait taken from nature. At the back of the shed can be seen the ill-used remains of an old cabinet of Gothic form, which has outlived the fashion of its time, and been turned adrift from the dwelling-house.* Such cases of vandalism might be multiplied until the catalogue became wearisome. Suffice it to say that, for those who search for old oak in the true spirit of the connoisseur, opportunities occur, even in these latter days, of acquiring specimens in what may be termed the 'rough,' which, after all, perhaps is one of the most desirable states to find them in.

* Precisely the same background appears in another picture by Teniers in the National Gallery (No. 805)—an old woman peeling a pear. This spot appears to have been a favourite one for the artist to paint, with its accidental arrangement of unconsidered lumber.

A curious discovery was made in London during the year 1903. In the course of the demolition of Holywell Street, in connection with the Holborn to Strand Improvement Scheme, an old chest was unearthed which, on being opened, was found to contain a quantity of deeds, including documents, mostly in Latin, ranging in date from 1433 to the commencement of the eighteenth century. The documents in this batch all bore on the history of an estate at Taplow, in Buckinghamshire, and comprise quit-claims, copies of Court Rolls, etc.; and the London County Council, in a creditable spirit of courtesy, offered them as a gift to the County Council of Buckinghamshire, by whom they were accepted.

To conclude this chapter, mention may be made of a discovery which happened in the early part of 1899 at the Royal Bull Hotel, Dartford. Beneath the foundations of the hostelry was unearthed an antique oak chest which, on being opened, was found to contain the skeleton of a man. From the vault in which this discovery was made a secret staircase (which had been walled up) formerly led to the upper apartments. Curiosity was set on foot, and it was then remembered that a man was murdered in this house in 1773, and that the mystery of the murder was further heightened by the disappearance of the body soon after its commission. The room in which the crime was committed was said to bear upon its walls marks of three bullets which passed through the victim. On carrying the examination further, a quantity

of death-warrants bearing the signature of the Duke of Portland, Minister of George III., was found behind the panelling. This discovery was all the more interesting to the author as he occupied the apartment during the autumn of 1890, little suspecting, of course, that he was slumbering in the midst of such a fine field of historical and antiquarian investigation.



FLEMISH COFFRET, SIXTEENTH CENTURY

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FORGERIES IN OLD OAK

IT has been said that of the making of many books there is no end, and the same remark now truly applies to the manufacture of 'ancient furniture.' With the course of time and inevitable clearing out by scouring of country districts, the demand has exceeded the supply; consequently a flood of imitations, some of them very artfully contrived, have been put upon the market. Forgeries are produced in several different ways. One is the outcome of the seeker for lucre, who imitates that which is difficult, or perhaps impossible of attainment, and then ingeniously endeavours to give his work the appearance of age. Another is more innocent in its origin, being produced by the loving copy of a genuine piece merely for the possessor's own gratification and use, without any intent to deceive. In time a death may occur in the family, and the piece passes into fresh hands, when the diligent imitation and true workmanship of the article may suggest possibilities to an unscrupulous spirit; certain processes may then be employed, and the piece becomes a forgery. To begin with, old wood is of the first

importance, and fragments are often worked in which actually-formed portions of antique furniture now gone to pieces. By these means the old surface is preserved, and the wear of certain parts, such as the bases of stiles and tread-bars, given on the production with a simplicity which is beautifully correct to the eyes of the unwary amateur. It also not unfrequently happens that the manufacture of a piece of rare shape is actually suggested by the possession of some uncommonly fine fragment.

Secondly, the joinery must be understood and copied. This may at first sight seem by no means a difficult matter, but there are many peculiarities connected with bygone methods which must be carefully studied and intelligently carried out to produce a really fine 'fake.' The plane must be eschewed and mouldings worked out of the solid wood, and not applied. The style of carving must be understood thoroughly, and carried out with a medieval disregard of exactitude, as long as the proper spirit is retained.* The appearance of wear is the next item, and this, to deceive the practised eye, is more than difficult of attainment. We have heard of one unscrupulous gentleman, not altogether unconnected with the fine arts, who had his floor literally paved with would-be old masters, which he gravely entreated his intimate friends to walk over, in order to produce certain unfailing signs of age.

* In France the best imitators of antique furniture actually reproduce the old tools before they venture to carve their forgeries.

Mysterious back-yards down which the weather beats remorselessly on Gothic cabinets put together last week are also frequently useful to the would-be deceiver. A certain amount of discoloration and wear being simulated, the pieces of furniture are often painted, and after being placed in the weather again, the paint is removed by means of potash, care being taken to leave portions in the corners and interstices of the carving. This pickling imparts a hungry gray colour to the oak, which is then treated in parts with some greasy substance, such as hellebore, to reduce such parts as still show a burr to proper condition. Sand-paper may perhaps be used, but the hand of an expert can detect the peculiar smoothness which this leaves without difficulty. The application of the sand-blast is a more effectual method of deception, as it drives out the softer parts of the fibre, and sometimes, when the medullary figuring is good, produces a satiny polish, which, with the adjacent disintegration, gives an extremely good imitation of antiquity. Repairs are also simulated in parts where such would most naturally be required, and done in wood of an obviously newer sort than that which the body of the forgery is constructed of.

To detect a really fine forgery is a delicious achievement. There is an enormous amount of instruction to be obtained from it—sometimes as much as may be imparted by the study of several genuine examples. This, of course, takes for granted that the various styles, changes, and interpolations have been thoroughly

learnt. One thing perhaps means the other, for a novice in the knowledge of periods would scarcely be sufficiently a judge of surface to outwit the producer of age. Some of the means employed by the Belgian 'fakers' must remain nameless. As a rule the Frenchman is far more expert in forgeries than his next-door neighbour, and less abominable in his methods. And yet we have seen spurious early cabinets and cupboards which have been so staggering as to induce transitory belief in their genuineness. With such credibility, however, comes a feeling of insecurity, and this is the touch-stone which ought to guard the connoisseur against an unfortunate purchase.

An instance of the gullibility of would-be collectors who have acquired no knowledge of styles may be cited here. A certain well-known and estimable peer, whose knowledge was not equal to his simple zeal, in the declining years of his life manifested a fancy to acquire specimens of antique oak, and spent his spare time rambling throughout the country 'picking up' curious specimens from the cottages and farm-houses which he chanced to visit. In most cases the supposed possessors parted with their belongings with every appearance of regret, but it was an open secret that the majority of these pieces had been carefully planted in their resting-places but a few days before by unscrupulous members of the trade for the inhabitants to sell upon commission. The movements of this nobleman were carefully ascertained and watched, and the abominable forgeries which he

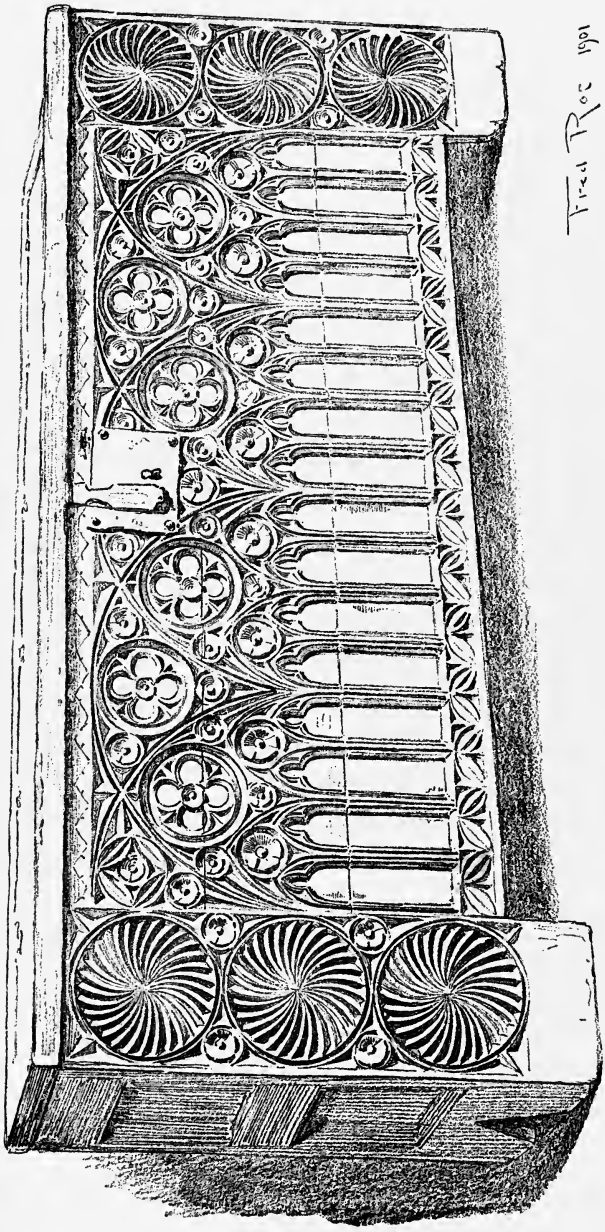
acquired in the pursuit of this pleasant recreation were such as to exceed belief. A little knowledge is a very dangerous thing, and in this case proved disastrous. The collection, which was deposited in an antique manor-house, is calculated to move alike to laughter and to tears; most of the specimens would not have deceived the merest tyro, exhibiting as they did actual specimens of late origin operated on by the hand of a carver who had not hesitated to adorn them with tenth-century dates, carved in modern figures, mingled with decorations of the nineteenth century which belonged particularly to Soho.

I once saw in the Midlands a spurious piece of 'old oak,' which had incised upon its front the anachronistic legend, 'God save the King, 1590'! In France these crudities are avoided; there these forgeries have developed into a fine art. It must be understood that these practices are strenuously deprecated by the better class of dealers, who have often been the means of rescuing pieces which would otherwise have been destroyed, and who, when taken in themselves by some clever sharper, do not hesitate to condemn the piece which they have bought from him rather than resell it.

A forgery of a different kind—one, however, which scarcely originated with the intention to deceive—may be seen in certain French and Flemish church chests, imitations of fifteenth-century Flamboyant and linen-panelled work, which were constructed some seventy or eighty years since. These, from their having

acquired a certain appearance of age and damage from actual wear, often deceive the uninitiated. Such pieces are mostly accurately and intelligently copied, and, being made of very old wood, their age is difficult to detect. No. 4,907, 1858, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, labelled 'French, 1490,' is a good specimen of this class of antique.

Forgeries of another nature than those already enumerated may also be met with, these being instances where the piece itself is genuine enough, but on which a certain portion, such as a date, for instance, has undergone some alteration with a view to enhancing its value in the eyes of the half-fledged collector. An example of this unscrupulous method may be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum, on a German or Dutch chest, with marquetry of mahogany, walnut, and other woods, and having raised and faceted panels. Along the top transom runs the legend, 'Charles Kroger, 1603,' which is also inlaid. The shape of the chest and its panels suggest late seventeenth-century workmanship to the casual observer. A nearer inspection, however, will show that the horseman who appears beneath the lock wears a costume very suggestive of Morland's pictures, and that the details of the decorative inlay consist partly of classic vases characteristic of the beginning of the nineteenth century. The truth is this: the chest and its inlay are genuine, but the figure '8' in the date has artfully been changed to a '6,' thus making the date appear as 1603 instead of two centuries later.



CARVED COFFER OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY DESIGN IN PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL

The alteration can be distinctly detected on a close examination. It is consoling to the British taxpayer to reflect that this antique was presented to the museum, and not acquired by purchase.

Yet another story in connection with the museum at South Kensington. In the oak gallery, which some wag once christened 'Wardour Street,' used to stand, not many years ago, a chest of ostensibly fifteenth-century French design and workmanship. It was elaborately buttressed and decorated with the carved figures of saints and panels filled with Flamboyant tracery. This chest was regarded for years with admiration and wonder, but its origin, I believe, was at length proclaimed by one of the workmen attached to the institution, who not only declared that he had made it himself, but successfully proved his assertion. The piece has since been removed to Bethnal Green Museum. I do not suggest that this chest was made, or ordered to be made, with intent to deceive in the first instance, but somehow during the course of the last twenty-five or thirty years it has acquired a most remarkable resemblance to a genuine old production, and it was for some years labelled and catalogued by the South Kensington authorities as a piece of veritable antiquity.

I can recommend a careful study of this astonishing chest to lovers of oak who wish to acquire proficiency and become experts in the science. A minute examination of the wood will show a slight burr in certain interstices of the carving, though hardly sufficient to

warrant its condemnation. A few other subtle indications may be discovered of its modernity. The whole piece, however, is executed with uncommon skill, the very crudities which appear on the figures forming part of its embellishment only serving to enhance its power of deception.

Forgeries are not unknown on the Continent at the present time, as the following paragraph, published through Dalziel's Agency in March, 1903, fully bears out:

'A singular story of another fraud perpetrated on one of the French national museums has come to light. Some time ago an apprentice in the service of an Orleans wood-carver named Caillot came to Paris, and paid a visit to the Musée de Cluny, and was astonished to find in it a choir-stall which had been made by Caillot.

'He reported his discovery to Caillot, who also visited the museum, and had great difficulty in convincing the authorities that he was really the maker. At last they allowed him to take the stall to pieces. He then showed them his own name and the date on which he had sold it carved inside. The dealer in antiquities who bought the article from Caillot paid £24 for it, and left it for some time in the vestibule of an old family house in the Faubourg St. Germain, the dealer having bribed the house-porter for the purpose. The stall was then represented as having belonged to the family for several generations, and the museum authorities paid £360 for it. When the real history

of the stall was discovered, the dealer refunded the money, took back the stall, and sold it a few weeks later to a rich American for £460.'

In the Victoria and Albert Museum is a huge Gothic armoire of German origin, which should also be carefully studied. This piece, which is decorated on the stiles with Gothic tracery, is furnished with most elaborate ironwork on its doors, or shutters, the panels of which are ornamented with a curious flowing pattern in which the trefoil is multiplied. This armoire, while being a superb thing in itself, has been deplorably tampered with. If the student wishes the truth, let him examine first the panels and then the longitudinal bands of carving on this great German press, and conscientiously pronounce whether they all belong to the same period. These panels are quoted as examples of Gothic work in some books of reference. The actual fact is that they have been 'carved up' during comparatively recent years. The handles which are attached to the doors are probably North Italian work, and have nothing whatever to do with the other ironwork. It is a great pity that so fine a specimen should not have been acquired before it had been subjected to such elaborately cruel treatment.

## NOTE ON AUTHORITIES

IN a work of this character it is the modern custom to supply a bibliography, and such a feature I would willingly add if the materials for its composition existed. Strictly speaking, however, there is scarcely a single volume treating of English furniture made prior to the eighteenth century in anything approaching a scientific spirit. The careful reader will have observed how largely I have depended upon my personal examination of actual surviving examples, unassisted by the descriptions and criticisms of earlier writers, not, I hope, from any undue feeling of self-reliance, but merely from the scantiness of published material to be drawn upon.

The oldest sources of information as to styles and dates are the illuminations on old manuscripts, particularly those of the fifteenth century. The British Museum and the Bodleian abound in illustrated manuscripts, which may be referred to with advantage. Barclay's 'Ship of Fools,' published in 1509, and Sir Anthony Fitzherbert's 'Boke of Surveying,' 1523, among other early-printed books, contain some valuable illustrations showing furniture contemporary with the beginning of the sixteenth century. Returning to manuscripts, Henry VIII.'s own Psalter, now in the British Museum, also contains some wonderful representations of furniture in the new Italian style which prevailed at Court

about this period. The determination of styles of the later periods of furniture is more easy, for of pictures in which contemporary furniture is depicted we have plenty, while internal evidence is sometimes afforded in the way of dates carved upon the objects themselves.

Harrison, in his 'Description of England,' 1577-1587, while treating of the home life of the middle classes of that period, gives many details showing the increase of luxury and appointments in the way of furniture consequent on the remarkable growth of national prosperity, and his statements on these matters are borne out by other contemporary writers.

With regard to modern books treating of the subject of ancient furniture, a place in the front rank must be assigned to 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture drawn from Existing Authorities,' by Henry Shaw, F.S.A., but the descriptions by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, K.H., LL.D., F.S.A., are meagre and of no scientific value, while in some cases they are obviously inaccurate. The work was published by William Pickering in 1856. Too much praise cannot be accorded to this work for the beauty and fidelity of many of its illustrations, which are also mainly of English examples.

Books treating of ancient furniture are usually only too prone to give prominence to foreign pieces, the works by Jacquemart and Willemin treating almost exclusively of Continental examples. Much the same may be said respecting volume i. ('Meubles') of Viollet le Duc's learned work, the 'Dictionnaire Raisonné du Mobilier Français,' though he occasionally includes an English piece. The 'Dictionnaire' is delightfully thorough, but sometimes errs on the side of excess in the way of restoration. That superb treatise, Parker's 'Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages,' treats incidentally of the subject of furniture; but, in addition to

this, the vast amount of knowledge which may be gathered from his pages on the architectural styles of the Gothic periods is of great assistance in leading to right conclusions on the subject of contemporary furniture, the fashion of which, it must be remembered, was always more or less influenced by architectural design. Hunt's 'Exemplars of Tudor Architecture,' published in 1830—the low-water period of taste—also contains some instructive and well-selected remarks upon furniture of the period with which it deals.

Movable furniture of the successive periods ranging from the middle of the sixteenth century down to the commencement of the mahogany period has been absolutely neglected by writers. Gotch, however, in his recently published work on the early Renaissance in England, gives some exceedingly thoughtful and highly technical descriptions of panelling and fittings in both domestic and ecclesiastical edifices. The author's own volume on 'Ancient Coffers and Cupboards,' published by Messrs. Methuen and Co. in 1902, was intended to afford a critical survey of one branch of old furniture, and to fill a gap left by other investigators. Of the tendency of modern magazines—some of them purporting to be technical—to reproduce some half-dozen illustrations of old or would-be old furniture, and to run round them an article, pleasantly written perhaps, but from which technical knowledge is conspicuous by its entire absence, little that is good can be said. The student should be warned against accepting the bulk of such articles as of any value. This is perhaps only to express a truth which is of common application to popular articles on all scientific subjects.

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